


The Hidden Life

J.R. Miller D.D

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THOMAS Y. CROWELL & COMPANY,
NEW YORK.

The Hidden Life

BY

J. R. MILLER, D.D.

AUTHOR OF "SILENT TIMES," "MAKING THE MOST
OF LIFE," "THE EVERY DAY OF LIFE,"
"BUILDING OF CHARACTER," ETC.

*"Out of the dark must grow,
Sooner or later, whatever is fair"*

New York

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PUBLISHERS

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SEVENTH THOUSAND

THE chapters in this little volume may have their message to some who are striving to live near the heart of Christ. It is the hidden life that makes the character. What we are in the depths of our being, where no human eye can penetrate, that we are actually, as God sees us. Then this inner life will ultimately work its way through to the surface, transforming the character into its own quality. Nothing can be more important, therefore, than that the hidden life be true, pure, beautiful, and Christlike.

J. R. M.

PHILADELPHIA.

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THE HIDDEN LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

THE HIDDEN LIFE.

"We live together years and years,
And leave unsounded still
Each other's springs of hopes and fears,
Each other's depths of will ;
We live together day by day,
And some chance look or tone
Lights up with instantaneous ray
An inner world unknown."

IN a sense, all life is hidden. The blood courses through the veins as the heart keeps throbbing, throbbing, day and night. You can lay your finger on your wrist and feel the pulsings. The lungs also continue breathing, inhaling, exhaling, without pause, from infancy's first gasp until at last watching friends say, "He is gone!" Pulsings, breathings — yes ; but have you found the life ? What

is it that keeps the heart throbbing and the lungs respiring? "Life," you say. Yes, but what is life?

Take the mind. It is very active. One man thinks, and writes beautiful poems or charming stories. Another thinks, and puts marvellous visions on canvas, or throws great bridges over rivers, or erects a noble cathedral. But who ever saw the processes of thought? Mental life is hidden.

Take heart-life — the life you lived yesterday, with its hopes and fears, its joys and sorrows, its pleasures and pains, its cares and its affections, its thousand varying experiences. Does the world know what is going on in your breast to-day, any day? People see the smile or the shadow that flits across your face, but they do not see the emotion which produced it. Even to your closest bosom friend your life is unrevealed, cannot be revealed. Says Keble:—

"Not even the tenderest heart and next our own
Knows half the reasons why we smile or sigh."

Take spiritual life. We see the effects of

the Holy Spirit's work — new dispositions, new conduct, new character ; but the divine spark of life we cannot see as it comes down from above. It is secret, hidden. One day you are sad, disheartened ; and, taking up your Bible, you find a sweet word of promise, a revealing of God's love, and into your heart there comes a strange peace. You are in sorrow. A friend sits down beside you, and speaks a few words of strong comfort. You are calmed and quieted. Yet no one sees any of these processes. They are hidden, secret.

There is an inspired word which says, "Your life is hid with Christ in God." The thought is wonderfully bold and strong. Christ is the source of the Christian's life. Christ is in heaven with God, in God, wrapped up in the very glory of divinity. Hence the Christian's life is with Christ in God. Its source is thus in the very heart of God.

Outside an old garden wall hung a great branch covered with purple clusters of grapes. No root was visible anywhere ; and those who saw it wondered how the vine grew, how its

life was nourished, where its roots clung. It was then discovered that the great vine from which this branch sprung grew inside the garden. There it had an immense root, with a stem like the trunk of a tree. This one branch had pushed out over the wall and hung there, bearing in the mellow autumn its clusters of luscious fruit.

Every Christian life in this world is a branch of a great vine which grows in heaven—a branch growing outside the wall. “Your life is hid with Christ in God.” We have heaven’s life in us in this world. The fruits that grow upon our life are heavenly fruits. Jesus spoke of giving his own peace to his disciples. He prayed that they might have his joy fulfilled in themselves. We read too that love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, are fruits of the Holy Spirit. Thus in our human experience in this world we are drawing our life and its support from the hidden source of life in the heart of God. This assures us of its security. It is beyond the reach of earthly harm. Herein, too, lies the secret of the quiet

peace which we find so often in Christian sufferers. In all their pain they are sustained by some hidden strength which the world cannot understand. They are drawing their life from a source which no earthly experience can reach or affect.

“ Oh! there are some who, while on earth they dwell,
And seem to differ little from the throng,
Already to the heavenly choir belong,
And even hear the same sweet anthem swell.

They joy, at times, with joy unspeakable,
Pouring to him they love their heartfelt song;
While to behold him face to face they long,
As the parched traveller for the cooling well.

Ask you how such from others may be known?
Mark those whose look is calm, their brow serene,
Gentle their words, love breathing in each tone,
Scattering rich blessings all around unseen.

They draw each hour, from living founts above,
The streams they pour around of peace and joy and love.”

One writes of watching an old tree in the autumn, as the leaves were touched by the frosts and fell off when the rough wind blew. As the tree at last became bare he saw a bird's nest on one of the branches. Through the

summer days the nest had been hidden beneath the thick foliage, but the blasts of winter which swept away the leaves uncovered this home and shelter of the birds. So, oftentimes, is it in the history of God's children. In their prosperity we see not their refuge, which is hidden and secret—hidden beneath the leaves of worldly prosperity. But when adversity comes, taking away earthly beauty, stripping off the bright foliage, their true and eternal refuge in God is disclosed. The storms of earth only drive them back into God's bosom.

We say a certain person's beauty has been wasted by sickness. One came to me whom I had not seen before for five years. Then a dark tragedy had just darkened her home, and I went to try to give a little comfort. Until that day her face had been beautiful with all the freshness of youth. But these five years since had been like twenty years in her life. The beauty was now faded; how could it have been otherwise, with the broken heart she brought out of those terrible days? Yet a few minutes' conversation showed me that in

all the wasting of physical beauty her spiritual loveliness had not been marred. She had kept near the heart of Christ in all the bitter anguish, and the joy and peace of her inner life had not failed. Beauty of the face is only external, and is transient. Any accident may mar it. But beauty of the soul is spiritual and imperishable. It abides even in the destruction of the body.

There is mystery in this hidden life which is in every Christian. It has a strange power of recognition. When two Christians meet, though utter strangers heretofore, there is something that reveals them to each other. The same life pulses in their hearts. They have the same hopes, the same joys, the same Christ, the same purpose in living, the same heaven. The world has nothing in common with Christians, but all who love Christ are members of one family.

“ I walk along the crowded streets, and mark

The eager, anxious faces,

Wondering what this man seeks, what that heart craves,

In earthly places.

Do I want anything that they are wanting?
Is each of them my brother?
Could we hold fellowship, speak heart to heart,
Each to the other?

Nay, but I know not! only this I know,
That sometimes, merely crossing
Another's path, where life's tumultuous waves
Are ever tossing —

He, as he passes, whispers in mine ear
One magic sentence only,
And in the awful loneliness of crowds
I am not lonely.

Ah, what a life is theirs who live in Christ!
How vast the mystery,
Reaching in height to heaven, and in its depth
The unfathomed sea!"

The Christian's life is hidden also in the sense that its true and full glory is concealed in this world, and will not appear until it enters the heavenly life. Only the bud is seen as yet; by and by the flower will burst into rich bloom. The best of every Christian's life remains unrevealed on the earth. We fail to realize even our own best intentions. You did not live yesterday as you

meant to live when you went out in the morning. No artist ever puts on his canvas all the beauty of his mental vision. No singer ever gets into the song he sings all the music of his soul. No saintly Christian ever translates into disposition and conduct all the spiritual loveliness that glows in his ideal. Our hands are too clumsy and unskilful to express the best things of our mind and heart in word or act or character. We see the good, but cannot do it in more than a mere fragmentary way. Yet the visions of beauty which we have in mere flashes and glimmerings are hints of divine revealings that are yet to be made, and of the wondrous possibilities which lie in the hidden depths of our nature, some day to be brought out.

The sea covers great fields of concealed splendors. Now and then a storm stirs its depths, and washes up a few brilliant shells or pebbles, which shine like fragments broken from heaven's walls. Yet these few stones or shells are only specimens of millions more, even more brilliant, that are buried in the

ocean depths. So there come out here and there, in a human life, in times of special exaltation, glimpses of something rarely beautiful — an act, a word, a self-denial, a disposition, the revealing of some noble quality or some marvellous power or measure of love; and we say as we see it, "That is like Christ. That is a gleam of heavenly life. That is a fragment of divinity." But that flashing gleam of character, that glimmering of Christlikeness, that act which seems too pure for earth, is only a hint of the infinite possibilities of each human soul. Hidden in the depths of the nature, under all its faults and imperfections, is a life which far surpasses the highest things that are reached in this world. The love, joy, peace, unselfishness, purity, holiness, attained in the saintliest experience of earthly Christian life, are but divine intimations of what we shall be when the limiting conditions of earth shall have been left behind.

There will be a time when all this hidden life shall be revealed. The bud shall burst

into the rich flower. The gem shall break through its rough imprisoning crust, and shine in lustrous splendor. The dull character that here shows only gleams and flashes of spiritual beauty, amid manifold defects, flaws, and infirmities, shall yet show in its every feature the beauty of Christ. The holy thoughts, desires, longings, and the hunger after righteousness, which here are hindered, restrained, limited, and which fail to take full form in life and character, shall yet be wrought out in deeds as beautiful and holy as themselves. We shall see Christ, and we shall be like him, when we shall see him as he is.

Some day we shall slip away from the things that are familiar to our eyes and hearts here, and shall enter into what we call the other life. Really, however, it is not another life, but only a fuller, deeper revealing of the life we have been living in Christ since we first gave ourselves to him. The mystery of the Christian's life of faith is that it is "hid with Christ in God." Here we touch but the outer edge of it; in what we call dying we shall press farther

into its blessedness. Here our little barks move only along the shore; by and by we shall sail out into the infinite expanse. There will be nothing to dread in the experience. We call it death, and we shudder at its mention; but really it is life — fulness of life. To those who watch us in departing we shall disappear; but to us the path will be only one of increasing brightness, as we go on until we enter into the presence of Christ.

“I watched a sail until it dropped from sight
Over the rounding sea. A gleam of white,
A last far-flashed farewell; and like to thought
Slipt out of mind, it vanished and was not.

Yet, to the helmsman standing at the wheel,
Broad seas still stretched before the gliding keel.
Disaster? Change? He left no slightest sign,
Nor dreamed he of that dim horizon line.

So may it be, perchance, when down the tide
Our dear ones vanish. Peacefully they glide
On level seas, nor mark the unknown bound.
We call it death—to them 'tis life beyond.”

So will it be when we leave this world. It

will not grow dark to our eyes, as we imagine it will do, when we enter the valley of shadows. We shall pass into fuller light, until we, too, are hid with Christ in God, in the glory of eternal life.

CHAPTER II.

THE OUTER AND INNER LIFE.

“ I wait
Till from my veiled brows shall fall,
This being's thrall,
Which keeps me now from knowing all.
In stormless mornings yet to be,
I'll pluck from Life's full-fruited tree
The joys to-day denied to me.”

IN every man there are two men. There is an outer man, that people can see ; there is an inner man, that no human eye can see. The outer man may be hurt, wounded, marred, even destroyed, while the inner man remains untouched, unharmed, immortal. St. Paul puts it thus : “ Though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day.” He is referring to his own sufferings as a Christian. His body was hurt by scourgings, by stonings, by exposure. It was worn by toil, and by endurance of hunger, of hard-

ship. But these things which scarred his body, leaving marks upon it, making it prematurely old, had no effect on the inner man. His real life was not wounded by persecution. It even grew in strength and beauty as the outer man decayed.

There is a quenchless life within our decaying life. The beating heart, the breathing lungs, the wonderful mechanism of the body, do not make up the real life. There is something in us which thinks, feels, imagines, wills, chooses, and loves. The poet lies dead. His hand will write no more. But it was not the poet's body that gave to the world the wonderful thoughts which have so wrought themselves into the world's life. The hand now folded shaped the lines, but the marvellous power which inspired the thoughts in the lines was not in the hand. The hand will soon moulder in the dust, but the poet is immortal. The outward man has perished; but the inner life is beyond the reach of decay, safe in its immortality.

The inner spiritual life of a Christian is not

subject to the changes that come upon his outer life. The body suffers ; but if one is living in fellowship with Christ, one's spiritual life is untouched by physical sufferings. The normal Christian life is one of constant, unchecked, uninterrupted progress. Unkindly conditions do not stunt it. Misfortunes do not mar it.

The inner growth of a Christian should be continuous. The renewal is said to be "day by day." No day should be without its line. We should count that day lost which records no victory over some fault or secret sin, no new gain in self-discipline, in the culture of the spirit, no enlargement of the power of serving, no added feature of likeness to the Master. "The inward man is renewed day by day."

This does not mean that all days are alike in their gain. There are special dates in every spiritual history which are memorable forever for their special advance — days when decisive battles are fought, when faults are discovered and conquered, when new visions of Christ are

granted, when the heart receives a new accession of divine life, when one is led into a new field of service, when a new friend comes into the life, when one takes new responsibilities or enters into new relations.

Then there are days in every life when there would seem to be no spiritual advancement. We all have our discouraged days. We have days that are stained by folly, marred by mistakes, blurred and blotted by sin; and these seem to be lost days. There are days when we appear to fail in duty or in self-control, or in struggle with temptation. The inner man would appear to be crippled and hurt in such experiences as these; and the days would seem to be idle and useless, without profit or progress. We come to the evening with sad confessions of failure, and with painful regret and disheartenment. But even such times as these are really gaining times, if we are living near the heart of Christ. We are at least learning our own weakness and frailty, the folly of self-dependence, the feebleness of our own best resolves. Ofttimes our defeats prove our great-

est blessings. No doubt many of our richest gains are made on the very days on which we weep most sorely over our mistakes and failures.

Then there are days that are broken by sorrow. The lights go out in our sky, and leave us in darkness. The friends of many years are taken away from us. Prosperity is turned to adversity. Misfortune touches our interests. Our circumstances become painful. Is not the growth of the inner life interrupted by such experiences? Not if we are truly abiding in Christ, and receiving from him the grace he has to give. No doubt many of the best, the divinest blessings of spiritual life come to us on just such days. The photographer takes his sensitive plate into a dark place to develop his picture. Sunlight would mar it. God often draws the curtain upon us, and in the darkness brings out some rare beauty in our life, some delicate feature of his own loveliness.

The teaching of the Scriptures is that, whatever the experience of the outer life, the

growth and enrichment of the inner life should never be interrupted or hindered. This is the divine purpose for us. Provision is made in the grace of God for this continuous work. We need never be harmed by anything that breaks into our life. Indeed, there is nothing that touches us in any way that may not be made to minister good to us. Woundings of the outer life may become pearls in the soul. Losses of earthly things may become gains in the spiritual realm. Sickness of the body may result in new health and increased vigor in the inner man. It is the privilege and the duty of the child of God to move upward and forward day by day, whatever the day's experience may be.

This is the meaning of the promises of peace which are found so frequently in the Bible. We have no assurance of a life without strife, trial, trouble, earthly pain, and loss ; but we are assured that we may have unbroken peace within, while the outer life is thus beset. "In the world ye shall have tribulation." "In me ye shall have peace."

The blessing of such a life in this world is incalculable. It becomes a source of strength, of shelter, of comfort, of hope, to many other lives. Susan Coolidge writes of one whose heart is kindest, and whose life is a perpetual benediction : —

“O heart beloved, O kindest heart !
Balming like summer and like sun
The sting of tears, the ache of sorrow,
The shy, cold hurts which sting and smart,
The frets and cares which underrun
The dull day and the dreaded morrow —
How when thou comest all turns fair !
Hard things seem possible to bear,
Dark things less dark, if thou art there.

Thou keepest a climate of thine own
’Mid earth’s wild weather and gray skies,
A soft, still air for human healing,
A genial, all-embracing zone
Where frosts smite not, nor winds arise ;
And past the tempest-storm of feeling
Each grieved and weak and weary thing,
Each bird with numbed and frozen wing,
May sink to rest and learn to sing.”

Then she writes, giving the secret of this wondrous power of helpfulness : —

“Like some cathedral stone begirt,
Which keeps through change of cold and heat
Still temperature and equal weather,
Thy sweetness stands, untouched, unhurt,
By any mortal storms that beat,
Calm, helpful, undisturbed forever.
Dear heart, to which we all repair,
To bask in sunshine and sweet air,
God bless thee ever, everywhere.”

We can be truest and best blessings to others only when we live victoriously ourselves. We owe it therefore to the needy, sorrowing, tempted world about us, to keep our inner life calm, quiet, strong, restful, and full of sweet love, in whatsoever outer turbulence of trial or opposition we must live. The only secret is to abide in Christ.

The lesson has a special application to sickness. Sickness is common. Not always does it prove a means of grace. There are some who are not spiritually benefited by it. Yet it is the duty and the privilege of every Christian so to meet the experience of illness or invalidism as ever to grow in it into Christlier character. The secret is a living faith in

Christ. Restlessness or distrust will mar the divine work that Christ would do in the heart ; but quiet submission to the will of God and peaceful waiting for him will ensure continual renewal of the inner life, even while the outer life is being consumed.

It is well, therefore, that those who are called to endure sickness should learn well how to relate themselves to it, so as not to be harmed by it. Sickness is discouraging. It is not easy for one with life broken, unable longer to run the race with the swift, to keep his spirit glad, cheerful, and wholesome. It is hard not to be able to do the heroic things which the unquenched spirit longs to do. Life seems now to be useless. They appear lost days, in which no worthy service can be done for Christ. Too often those who are called to invalidism lose out of their heart the hope, the enthusiasm, the zest of living, and become depressed, unhappy, sometimes almost despairing. But this is to fail in true and noble living. When we cannot change our conditions, we must conquer them through

the help of Christ. If we are sick, we would better not fret nor chafe. Thereby we shall only make our illness worse, retarding our recovery, while at the same time we shall mar the work of grace going on in our inner life. The captive bird that sits on its perch and sings is wiser than the bird that flies against the wires and tries to get out, only bruising its wings in its unavailing efforts. The sick-room may be made a holy of holies instead of a prison. Then it will be a place of blessing.

The lesson has its application, also, for those who are growing old. Old age ought to be the most beautiful period of a good life. Yet not always is it so. There are elements in the experience of old age which make it hard to keep the inner life ever in a state of renewal. The bodily powers are decaying. The senses are growing dull. It is lonely. There is in memory a record of empty cribs and vacant chairs, of sacred mounds in the cemetery. The work of life has dropped from the hands. It is not easy to keep the

joy living in the heart in such experiences. Yet that is the problem of true Christian living. While the outward man decays, the inward man should be renewed day by day. This is possible, too, as many Christian old people have proved. Keeping near the heart of Christ is again, as always, the secret. Faith gives a new meaning to life. It is seen no more in its relation to earth and what is gone, but in its relation to immortality and what is to come. The Christian old man's best days are not behind him, but always before him. He is walking, not toward the end, but toward the beginning. The dissolving of the earthly tabernacle is a pledge that the house not made with hands is almost ready.

The lesson has its application also for death. That seems to be the utter destruction of the outer man. The body returns to the dust whence it came. What of the inner life? It only escapes from the walls and fetters which have confined it on the earth. It is as when one tears a bird's cage apart, and the bird, set free, flies away into the heavens.

An old man, nearing his end, spoke of his bodily decay, the tokens of the approach of death, as the land-birds lighting on the shrouds, telling the weary mariner that he is nearing the haven. Death is not misfortune; it is not the breaking up of life; it is growth, development, the passing into a larger phase of life. We need death for life's completing.

“Death is the crown of life;
Were death denied, poor man would live in vain;
Were death denied, to live would not be life;
Were death denied, e'en fools would wish to die.
Death wounds to cure; we fall; we rise; we reign;
Spring from our fetters; hasten to the skies,
Where blooming Eden withers in our sight.
Death gives us more than was in Eden lost;
This king of terrors is the prince of peace.”

.

CHAPTER III.

SATISFACTION — NOT REPRESSION.

“The mighty God! Here shalt thou find thy rest,
O weary one! There is naught else to know,
Naught else to seek — here thou may'st cease thy quest.
Give thyself up. He leads where thou shalt go.

“The changeless God! Into thy troubled life
Steals strange, sweet peace; the pride that drove thee on,
The hot ambition and the selfish strife
That made thy misery, like mists are gone.”

THIRST is characteristic of humanity. Wherever you find a human soul you find in it longings, desires, yearnings. Then it is only commonplace to say that in all this world there is nothing to satisfy a human soul. There has been no lack of searching for a fountain of life whose waters will quench human thirst; but in vain. There is nothing that has not been tried, and yet always the result has been the same:

“Life's thirst quenches itself
With draughts which double thirst.”

The theory of happiness which Buddhism proposes is to tear desire from the soul, and to destroy the heart's hunger. But this is not possible. A craving repressed, held in check, shut up in the heart, is not at rest. The desire still lives, though caged, smothered, confined. Happiness never can be found in this way.

Christ came to tell us of a way in which our soul's thirsts and cravings may all be satisfied. Instead of crushing them within the heart, he would let them live, and would find perfect satisfaction for them.

These longings within us are not evil in themselves. They are the divine qualities in our soul crying out for divine nourishment. We are not bodies—we are souls, immortal souls. We bear the image of God. We belong to heaven. It is no wonder that house and furniture and pictures and sumptuous fare and rich clothing will not answer our higher nature's needs. How could such things satisfy an immortal soul? Imagine an angel living in the house of one of our worldly mil-

lionaires, and living just as the millionaire lives. How much comfort would he get from it all? It is because we have in us the divine that earth cannot satisfy us.

“ Thank God for life; life is not sweet always;
Hands may be heavy laden, heart care-full,
Unwelcome nights follow unwelcome days,
And dreams divine end in awakenings dull;
Still it is life; and life is cause for praise.
This ache, this restlessness, this quickening sting
Prove me no torpid and inanimate thing, —
Prove me of him who is the life, the spring.
I am alive, — and that is beautiful.”

A traveller tells of holding in his hand the egg of a rare East India bird which was so near the hatching that the bird inside was pecking away at the shell. He could hear it struggling to get out. It was shut away in the darkness, cramped, confined, but it was not content to stay there. It seemed to know that there was a larger life for it outside, that on wings it might soar away to greet the morning light, that it might put on splendors of beauty, that it might look on mountains, valleys, and rivers, and bathe in the pure air of sunny skies.

This bird in the shell is a picture of the higher nature which is within every human life. It is not satisfied. It is a prisoner longing to be liberated. It is conscious of a wider freedom, a larger liberty, that is possible to it. We are made for communion with God. The mission of Christ to us is to bring us out into this larger, fuller life. Instead of vainly trying to satisfy our spiritual needs and cravings at earth's fountains, he leads us to heaven's fountains. He reveals to us the love of God. He tells us that we are God's children, and brings us into intimate relations with our Father in heaven. He gives us intimations of a future for ourselves that is full of blessedness and glory. He calls us to this larger life.

So the hunger for love in our beating heart is the prophecy of a satisfaction of love which is possible in Christ. The longing for holiness, for strength, for beauty of character, for power of helpfulness, for Christlikeness, is a revealing of our capacity for noble living, and of the spiritual growth to which we may attain and shall attain, unless by unbelief and sin we

stunt, choke, and smother the immortal life that is ours as Christians.

Take another illustration from nature. The dragon-fly is born at the bottom of the pond, and for a time lives there, a low, meagre form of life. It does not know of anything better—that there is a higher sphere where insects and other creatures have wings, and fly in glorious freedom in the sunny air. But one day there comes a wondrous change. Tennyson tells the story well:—

“To-day I saw the dragon-fly
Come from the wells where he did lie.

An inner impulse rent the veil
Of his old husk: from head to tail
Came out clear plates of sapphire mail.

He dried his wings: like gauze they grew;
Thro’ crofts and pastures wet with dew
A living flash of light he flew.”

This dragon-fly of the darkness and the mire now breathes heaven’s sweet air. It has wings, which unfold under the impulse of the new life into which it has emerged, and spread themselves out in shining beauty, and the

lovely creature soars aloft. It is dead to its old life in the ooze, and lives now in the brightness and the fragrance of the fields and gardens.

This, too, is a picture of the new life in Christ to which human souls may rise. Satisfaction can never be found in mere earthly conditions. In these we are like dragon-flies, living at the bottom of the pond, while our true place is up in the sunny air, with wings outspread, soaring in blessed liberty. Thus only in this new life can our thirsts be satisfied.

There are mistaken thoughts of what we must do with our cravings and longings. The Buddhist says we must crush them. Many Christian people have the same thought. They suppose that many of their desires and yearnings are sinful and must be crucified. But this is not true. Our longings are parts of our greater nature. God has not put a single yearning or desire in us that needs to be destroyed. Our passions, appetites, and affections are not depraved qualities in us. They may become depraved through our efforts to

gratify them in mere earthly or in sinful ways, but in themselves they are not evil. They belong to our divine likeness, and are all meant to be satisfied. But this satisfaction can come only in true uses of our powers.

A man found a wild torrent in the mountain. It could work only waste and ruin as it rushed, uncontrollable, down the gorge. He built a flume for it, and carried its wild floods in quiet streams down into the valley, where they watered the fields and gardens, gave drink to the thirsty, and turned many a wheel of industry. That was far better than if he had dried up the torrent. It was far better, too, than if it had been left to flow on forever with destructive force. Now it was flumed and made to do good, and make the world richer and more beautiful. That is what God wants to do with the cravings, the desires, the passions, the longings, and all the mighty energies of our nature. They are not to be destroyed. Yet they are not to be allowed to work waste and ruin in efforts to find gratification in merely earthly channels, in unbridled license,

That is sin's way. Rather, these great forces in our nature are to come under the yoke of Christ, and are to be led by him into all holy service for God and man.

Years ago there were in southern California great stretches of burning plains, covered with dry sand, with scarcely a living thing growing anywhere upon them. Meanwhile, up in the mountains, there were streams of water, produced by the melting snows, running to waste, oftentimes causing damage as they rushed down the gorges. Men saw that if those wasting and destructive streams could only be carried down into the valleys, and made to distribute their waters over the alkaline sands, the desert could be changed into a garden. To-day great orange orchards grow on what, twenty-five years ago, were barren wastes.

This is an illustration of what the forces of human nature, which now in so many lives run riot in dissipation, doing harm to others, and hurt to God's kingdom, might be trained to do, if all their energies were but turned to noble and beneficent uses. That is what Christ pro-

poses to do with those who come to him. He sets them free, not by unleashing them to live without law or control, but by bringing them under his own yoke, where in true and holy serving and obedience they will not only find rest and peace for themselves, but will also become means of carrying benediction to others.

In no other way can the longings and cravings of human hearts find satisfaction. These were not made for idle rest, but for healthful activity. The affections can find satisfaction only in loving, and in loving purely, truly, unselfishly. Love is not a sinful passion; it is sinful only when it is perverted from its true end and debased, and becomes unholy lust. Nor is love an unworthy or an unmanly quality. God is love—love is his very nature. To live is to love. Loving in its true sense is the whole of living. We can never find satisfaction until we have learned to love in a Christlike way, as Christ loved us, giving our life as he did to be consumed in the flame of love.

The mind can never find satisfaction for its thirst save in learning. The desire to know is part of the divine likeness in us. On all sides books are lying open, and we are bidden to read. The voices of wisdom are evermore speaking in our ears, and we are bidden to listen. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." One of the first words the great Teacher speaks to those who come to him to find rest for their souls is, "Learn—learn of me." Our minds are made to know, and they can find rest only through knowing. There is no true peace in ignorance. It is only an empty and shallow "bliss" that is found in not knowing. Our minds are made to think, and can be satisfied only in thinking. Satisfaction can come to any function of our being only when it finds the use for which it was made, and devotes itself to that use.

The spirit can find satisfaction only as it attains the character which belongs to it. There is a beatitude for hunger and thirst—for those who long for righteousness. Such thirst is a mark of life. The dead have no

longings, no desires. They are satisfied. Wherever there is spiritual life there is unrest, unsatisfaction, a hunger for larger life, richer, fuller, holier. Such thirst can never find satisfaction save in ever-new attainments of holiness, in forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forward to the things that are before. Complete satisfying will never come until we reach the full stature of Christ, until we see him, and are made like him ; but in the Christian life on earth the beginnings of this perfect satisfying are realized.

So it is with all the powers of our being. Longing is a quality of true living, and a mark of health. It is the upward looking and striving of our nature. We can attain satisfaction only as our powers find their right functions and their right uses, and train themselves to run in the channels in which they were made to run. The word of Augustine is true enough almost to be an inspired word : " Our souls were made for God, and can find no rest until they find it in God." But not always have our life-teachers explained to us the full mean-

ing of this divine truth. Too often they have given us only half of it. It is not enough to come to Christ, and nestle in his bosom in the joy of reconciliation and forgiveness. Sometimes that is as far as our teachers lead us. Satisfaction can never come in inaction, however holy the state may be. The powers of the life must be disciplined and trained, and then led out into active service. They must find the use for which they were made. Knowing and doing must go together, or there can be no fulness of life, nor any true rest in living.

It is not enough to seek attainments merely for the sake of the attainments. That will bring no satisfaction. Learning merely to know, neither enlarges nor truly enriches the mind. It is only when we desire more knowledge in order that we may use it in living more nobly and in doing greater good to others that we are led into deeper peace. Says Froude: "The knowledge which man can use is the only real knowledge which has life and growth in it, and converts itself into practical

power. The rest hangs like mist about the brain, or dries like raindrops off the stones." The same rule applies in all our longings. To desire to be good merely for the sake of being good, to stand up among men in holy beauty but with no wish to make one's goodness a power in honoring God and in blessing the world, will bring no true and permanent satisfying.

After all, satisfaction can come only through the consecration of all the powers to God for love's service. Deeper amid the laws of our immortal being than any of us can ever know in this world, lies the *must* of service. "*Ich dien*," I serve. I must serve. "Not to be ministered unto, but to minister," is the divinest law of moral and spiritual life ever enunciated by any teacher. This is the way, the only way, to satisfaction. The powers of the soul must be led out in the paths of their own true craving, to lay hold upon the things which they were made to attain. They must not be repressed or destroyed, but must be drawn out, directed, disciplined. Then all the life

must reach its divine purpose in becoming as Christ to the world, living to bless others, giving itself in utter abandonment to help save the world.

This is the way, and the only way, to the satisfying of human desires. The water that Christ gives alone can quench the soul's thirst. Only as we return to God, and to the place and service for which we were created, can we be at peace. Obedience, likeness, service, are the keywords of spiritual life. Earthly satisfaction at the best is incomplete ; but the well in the heart in this life springs up into eternal life. What we call dying is but entering into fulness of life and perfection of blessedness.

CHAPTER IV.

COMFORT IN CHRIST'S KNOWLEDGE OF US.

"Thou knowest, not alone as God, all-knowing;
As man, our mortal weakness thou hast proved;
On earth, with purest sympathies o'erflowing,
O Saviour, thou hast wept and thou hast loved;
And love and sorrow still to thee may come
And find a hiding-place, a rest, a home."

To many people the thought of Christ's perfect knowledge of them is an unwelcome one. It awes them and troubles them. But if we are living as we should live, if we are true to our purpose and sincere in our striving, the consciousness that Christ knows all about us should give us great comfort.

Too often this thought of the divine omniscience is presented as an element of terror. Children are told that God sees them; and the fact is presented to them as one which should inspire dread, and they are made to fear God's eye. The words "Thou God seest me" are

quoted and commented upon as if it had been in stern aspect that the Lord appeared to Hagar. Really, however, it was of a friendly revealing that these words were first used. Under God's all-seeing eye was a shelter of love for the poor woman. So it is always that God looks down upon his children ; his look is ever kindly. He is our friend, not our enemy ; and his feeling toward us is very gracious and loving. The thought of his perfect knowledge of us should never be an oppressive one ; and it will not be so if we understand even a little of his yearning interest in us, and if we have even a faint conception of his infinite patience.

True, our life is full of failures and blemishes. We mean to be loyal to Christ, but the world is hard, and we are very weak. At the best, we get only little fragments of the beauty of Christ into our character. We are Christ-like only in dim, blurred resemblances in our disposition and conduct. We intend to be gentle and loving ; but we mar our days oft-times with unhappy tempers, querulous bickerings, unseemly complaints, and selfish striv-

ings. We intend to be strong in faith, allowing nothing to make us fear or doubt ; but our trust fails us many times, and we grow fearful in life's stress. We mean to be consistent Christians, to live blamelessly in this evil world ; but our strength is small, and temptations are sore ; and where is the day which is not marred by failures ?

When we come into the presence of Christ with our broken vows and our stained records, what can we say ? Can we look up into his blessed face and declare that we love him, with the memory of all our faults, inconsistencies, and failures fresh in mind ? Is not our poor Christian life a denial of our fair profession ? We might say that we are sorry, and will not repeat these sins and follies ; but have we not been saying this over and over, perhaps for years, and then almost immediately repeating the things we deplored and promised never to repeat ?

What shall we do ? If Christ were but a man like ourselves, judging of love by its deeds, we could not hope for his patient bear-

ing with us. Men are not so tolerant of our failures. They grow weary of our broken vows. They do not know our inner life; they cannot see the sincerity which is in our heart beneath all that would seem to prove us insincere. But here it is that we find the comfort in Christ—in his perfect knowledge of us. He knows not only the sin and wrong that are in us, but he knows also whatsoever in us is true and sincere. He sees the little true love—little, yet true—that there is amid the weakness, the broken vows, and the sad failures.

It was in Christ's knowledge of him that Peter found his comfort when, after his denials, Jesus asked him three times, "Lovest thou me?" What could he say about his love, with that sad story of inconsistency so close behind him? He could take refuge only in the assurance that his Master knew all—what was true and sincere, as well as what was so false and unworthy. "Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee."

We may find comfort in the same consciousness. If Jesus did not know us perfectly, if

he, like men, judged only from our acts, our behavior, then we could not make such an appeal. But he sees into our heart. The sincere love for him which we know we have, in spite of all that seems so contradictory of love, he sees. So we can ever, with simple confidence, say, "Thou knowest," and rest there.

"I strive, but fail; oh, why, dear Lord,
Must this my constant record be?
Why finds each daily westering sun
My work for thee but half begun,
Or done, alas! so selfishly?

I'm tempted oft, and often yield,
For Pleasure hath a siren voice;
She sings my scruples quite away,
And with her charming roundelay
Deprives me of the power of choice.

My faith is strong when skies are bright;
But sunny days are all too brief.
When clouds arise, and sorrows come,
My lips are sealed, my heart is dumb,
And full of weary unbelief.

But this, dear Lord, my comfort is:
My troubled heart is known to thee;
Thou knowest that I love thee, Lord;
And, Saviour mine, I love thy word
That this shall my salvation be."

There is another phase of the comfort we have in Christ's perfect knowledge of us. The world is not charitable toward our faults. Men are quick to note our inconsistencies. They see our faults with unfriendly eye. They are not patient with our infirmities. They easily doubt our sincerity when we fail to live up to our profession. Then sometimes men misunderstand us even when in our hearts we are really most faithful. Jesus himself was continually misjudged and misunderstood. Men took his noblest and divinest acts, and made them appear unworthy and sometimes even disreputable. The disciples must not hope to escape the misrepresentation and the maligning which the Master himself had to endure. There are few good men who are not at some time in their life misjudged or falsely accused. But in all such experiences we know there is One who knows the truth about us, who is always charitable in his judgment, who never misunderstands or misjudges us. When we have sinned and failed, yet knowing in our heart that we are repentant and sincere, or

when we are misunderstood or falsely accused, we can look up with confidence into Christ's face, and say, "Lord, thou knowest." There is wonderful comfort in such cases in the consciousness that he understands all.

This love that is in the heart of Christ is a wonderful love. It is a love that never tires of us. We are not sure always of such patience and endurance in human affection. We complain if our friends do not return as deep, rich, and constant love as we give them. We are hurt at any evidence of the ebbing of love in them. Human love is oft-times chilled and even repelled by the discovery of things unworthy, traits of character that are not beautiful, acts that are not right.

We are not sure always that human friends will love us still when they know all about us. We could not trust the world with the perfect knowledge that Christ has of our real inner life. There are records in the secret history of most of us that we would not dare spread out before the eyes of men. There are things in us — jealousies, envyings, self-

ish desires, earthward turnings, unholy affections—which we would not feel safe in laying bare even to our dearest and most patient friends. But Christ knows all. Yet we need not be afraid to trust him with all the innermost frailties, faults, and failures of our life. His love will not be turned back by these repulsive things while it finds in us even the feeblest true love for him. “He knows all, yet loves us better than he knows.”

In one sense it is not easy for Christ to save us. We struggle and resist, and there is much in us that persistently disputes his sway. It was the prayer of a saintly man, “Lord, save me in spite of myself.” We must all be saved, it would seem, if ever, in spite of ourselves. St. Paul found a law in his members forever opposing the impulses of the new nature in him, making him do the things he would not. The only way Christ can save any of us is by never giving us up, never letting go his hold upon us, never allowing our stubborn earthward striving to drag us out of his hands.

If he ever did grow weary of our persistent sinning, and were to let us have our own way, what would be the result? Suppose that Jesus had let Peter go that night after his denial, giving him no further thought, what would have become of the poor fisherman? He would have been swept away on the dark bosom of sin's floods, and would never have seen his Lord's face again. We do not know the perils of our own weakness, nor our capacity for sinning.

When the disciples were told by their Lord that one of them should betray him, they did not begin to suspect one another. Each one seemed to be seized with a terrible dread lest it might be himself that would do this dreadful thing. Who has not shuddered when hearing of the fall of some other person into sad, dishonoring sin, feeling that it might have been himself? Terrible are the possibilities of sin in human hearts. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"

We talk lightly of sin and sin's dangers.

We speak oftentimes sternly and bitterly of those who are overcome in temptation, and swept down in its relentless tides. Oftentimes we have little charity for those who fall. It is because we do not know sin's awful power. There is evil enough lurking in the heart of the holiest of us, if only it were unleashed, to destroy our souls forever. Nothing but the mighty power of the grace of God keeps unto final salvation those who are preserved blameless through life. We cannot fathom what we might have been, abandoned to ourselves to drift in the wild floods, had it not been for the hand of Christ, who saves us from our fatal self.

It is told of a saintly man, that by his own request the only epitaph on his grave was the word "Kept." We are all kept, we who do not fall away into the darkness of eternal death — we are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. Some people speak of the beginning of their Christian life, when they decide to follow Christ, as if that were all, as if the struggle were all over

when the choice is made. We hear it said that certain persons are saved, as if the whole of being saved were accomplished in the one act of deciding to be a Christian. Really, however, the struggle only begins with the conversion, ending only when the life reaches glory.

Some speak, too, as if all Christ's work in saving us had been done on the cross nineteen hundred years ago, in his giving up of himself for us. But his actual work in saving us is done with us, and in us, one by one, in teaching us life's lessons, giving us grace to overcome in temptation, lifting us up when we have fallen, going after us and bringing us back when we have wandered away, and keeping us from the world's deadly evils. Were it not for this patient, never-failing, watchful love of Christ, not one of us would ever be saved.

It is Christ's perfect knowledge of us that gives such infinite patience to his love and grace. He knows the sincerity that is in us; he sees, too, the possibilities of good that are in us—not what we are now, but what we are to be when the work in us is finished.

There is a word of St. John's which says, "We shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." This is a vision of the final outcome of Christ's work in saving us. The mother of the artist saw in her boy's childish attempts, foregleams of genius, and kissed him to encourage him. That kiss made him an artist. So the patient, loving Christ sees in our poor living, in our yearnings, our human discontents, our strivings, our hungers, our longings, gleams of what we may become; and it is to bring out these possibilities that he deals with us in such grace and gentleness.

So we may trust Christ with the innermost things of our life. We need not be afraid, however faulty or sinful we know ourselves to be, to lay all at his feet in holy confidence. Lucy Larcom's lines voice Christian faith's attitude before Christ:

Lord, I would offer thee
A heart's untarnished gold;
And yet how can it be
When all there is in me
Is touched with blight and mould?

I find within no thought
So holy that it may
Unshamed to thee be brought,
Except as it hath caught
From thee a hallowing ray.

Yet all I am is thine;
Through sins and flaws and stains
I feel thy presence shine.
Take me, and make divine
All that uncleansed remains.

Lord, of thyself not much
In me canst thou behold,
And yet thou savest such;
The magic of thy touch
Transmutes my dross to gold.

Contrition thou dost prize
All sacrifice above.
Dear Lord, I dare arise
And look into thine eyes,
Because I know thy love.

CHAPTER V.

A CONDITION OF DIVINE BLESSING.

Like a blind spinner in the sun
I tread my days ;
I know that all the threads will run
Appointed ways ;
I know each day will bring its task,
And, being blind, no more I ask.

HELEN HUNT JACKSON.

THERE is a secret of living which, if people knew it, would make all life easier for them. It may be stated thus — that as we take up any duty and go forward with it, we shall receive the strength we need to do it. There are several divine promises that give this assurance. One reads, “As thy days, so shall thy strength be.” This seems to mean that the help which God gives varies according to the necessity of the particular day. When we have abundance of ordinary human strength, we do not need so much special divine help,

and God then gives less. Really it is always God's strength that we have, whether it is what we call natural, or whether it comes in a supernatural way. When we have human friends about us, with sweet companionships, we do not need so much the revealing of the divine presence and the companionship of the unseen Friend ; but when we lose the human, then we need the divine more deeply ; and in the loneliness God makes himself known to us as never before. So it is in all our experiences. God fits his blessing to our days. When we faint, he increases strength. When we are sorrowful, he gives comfort. When we are in danger, he grants protection. When we are weary, he gives rest. "As thy days, so shall thy strength be."

Another of the promises reads, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Every word of this assurance shines with radiant light. It is Christ's grace that is sufficient. We know that he has all divine fulness, and therefore we are sure that no human need can ever exhaust his power to give help. It is

Christ's grace that is sufficient. If it were anything else but grace, it might not give us such comfort. Grace is undeserved favor, — goodness shown to the unworthy. We deserve nothing, for we are all sinners. But it is grace that is sufficient for each one — “for thee,” the promise runs; and that means each one who reads it or hears it. It is present tense, too, — “is sufficient.” Christ is always speaking personally to the one who is in any need, and saying, “My grace is sufficient for thee.” Then the word “sufficient” is one whose meaning expands and amplifies with the measure of the need. No necessity is so small as not to be included, and none is so great as to go beyond the capacity of the blessing that is promised.

There are divine words, also, which imply that the supply of blessing that we receive will depend upon ourselves. God's people in ancient times were commanded to cross the Jordan, the promise being that the stream would divide for them. Yet the waters would not have parted for them if they had not

gone forward in obedience and faith. As a matter of fact, it was only when the feet of the priests, walking in advance, were wetted in the rushing floods, that the stream began to sink away. When Jesus was ready to send forth his disciples to bear his gospel, his command was, "Go ye into all the world." Then came the promise, "And lo! I am with you all the days." The promise is very precious, but we cannot separate it from the command. We cannot have this blessed presence unless we are, in our own way, to the measure of our own ability, seeking to make disciples of all nations. It is when we go out in his name that he will be with us.

This is the unvarying law of spiritual blessing and good. Life lies before us, with its burdens, its duties, its responsibilities, its struggles, its perplexities. It does not come to us all in one piece. God breaks our years into months and weeks and days, and never gives us more than just a little at a time—never more than we can bear or do for the

day. Then if we take up the present duty or burden, we shall always have strength to do it. If we have enough of our own natural strength, —and that is God's strength too, —he does not need to give us special strength; for why should anything so precious as strength be wasted? But if we do not have strength of our own sufficient for the work or struggle, we need not falter, but should go on, just as if we had omnipotence in our arm; for the promise is that if we honor God by obeying him, though the task be impossible to our ability, he will honor us by giving us all the help we need. The river will surely open when he has bidden us to cross it, if only we move on as if there were no river. The bread will surely be given when we enter the wilderness, following the divine leading, if only we go on as if we had abundance of provision.

But we must not forget that the blessing which is promised depends upon our faith and obedience. If we do not begin the task that seems impossible, if we wait to receive

the help before we will begin it, the help will never come. If we do not begin our march toward the river, waiting till it opens, it will not open at all. If we do not enter upon the struggle, waiting for strength to be given for the battle before we accept it, we shall never get the strength. An old proverb says, "Get thy spindle and thy distaff ready, and God will send the flax." Yes; but he will not send the flax unless we get the spindle and the distaff ready. We must do our part, thus proving our faith, or God will not do what he has promised, for his promise is conditional. Another old proverb says, "For a web begun God sends the thread." We must take up the scant bundle of threads we have, and begin our weaving, confident that the Lord will provide threads as we go on, enough to finish the web. He will never put his threads into folded, waiting hands. The best commentary on this proverb that can be given is a little poem by Josephine Pollard, the last she ever wrote:—

"'For a web begun God sends the thread.'

Over and over these words I read;

And I said to myself with an easy air,
'What need to burden myself with care
 If this be true,
 Or attempt to do
More than my duty? For here is proof
That we are to hold ourselves aloof
Until from the Master we receive
The thread for the web we are to weave!'

So day after day I sat beside
The loom, as if both my hands were tied,
With idle shuttle and slackened warp,
Useless as strings of an untuned harp;
 For I took no part
 With hand or heart
In the work of the world. To the cry of need,
The voice of the children, I gave no heed.
'When the task is ready for me,' I said,
'God will be sure to supply the thread.'

Others might go in cellars and slums,
And weave a web out of scraps and thrums,
Finding excuse for the daily toil,
The reckless waste of life's precious oil;
 But as for me,
 I could not see
How I was to follow them, or believe
That the needed strength I should receive,
Unless I waited, howe'er time sped,
For God to send me the promised thread.

I had no strength of my own, I knew,
No wisdom to guide, no skill to do,

And must wait at ease for the word of command,
For the message I surely should understand,

Else all in vain

Were the stress and strain;

For the thread would break, and the web be spoiled —

A poor result for the hours I'd toiled;

And my heart and my conscience would be at strife

O'er the broken threads of a wasted life.

But all at once, like a gem exhumed,

The word 'begun' — by a light illumed —

From the rest of the text stood boldly out,

By the finger of God revealed, no doubt;

And shocked and dazed,

Ashamed, amazed,

I saw as I had not seen before,

The truer meaning the sentence bore,

And read as Balthasar might have read:

'For a web *begun* God sends the thread.'

The man himself, with his mind and heart,

Toward the Holy City must make a start,

Ere he finds in his hands the mystic clew

That shall lead him life's mazes safely through.

And if loom and reel

And spinning-wheel

Idle and empty stand to-day,

We must reason give for the long delay,

Since the voice of the Master has plainly said,

'For a web begun God sends the thread.'"

There is a whole sermon in these lines.
There are thousands of good people who do

almost nothing with their life because they are waiting for God to send the thread before they will begin to weave the web of duty he bids them to weave. They say, "I want to be useful; I want to do good; but God has not given me anything to work with." Now, the truth is, that God has given them enough to begin with, and that is all he will give them at first. There were only five barley loaves, and there were five thousand hungry people. What were these among so many? But for the web begun God sent the thread that day. There was only a little meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse, and there were years of famine yet to be passed through. But again for the web begun God sent the thread.

The teaching is for us, and it is one of the most practical lessons we can learn. Put your hands to the tasks that are surely yours, never asking whether you are able to do them or not, and not waiting for God to provide all the strength or all the material you will need, before you begin to do them. Whatever is your duty must be done, no matter how far

beyond your strength it may be. It is yours to begin ; it is God's to help you through ; and he will, if you honor him by trusting him.

Those who live lives of great usefulness have always begun with the little they had. It grew in their hands, until they filled a large sphere of usefulness, touching many lives with the benediction of their helpfulness. For a web begun God sent the thread.

The same law of human diligence and divine blessing prevails in the building up of character. Ten lepers cried to Jesus for healing. He answered, bidding them go and show themselves to the priest. That was what the law required lepers to do after they had been cured, when the priest would give them a certificate of health and cleanness, permitting them to return again to society. These lepers were not yet cured. Their bodies showed no mark of healing. But they promptly obeyed the Master's word ; and "as they went they were cleansed."

There are those who long for a beautiful life,

for a transformed character, but it seems they never can attain to such renewal, they are so full of faults and blemishes. But if they begin to follow Christ, starting with the little fragment of Christlikeness which their hands can pick up, God will help them, and they will grow at last into rich beauty of soul. Get the victory over the one temptation of the hour, and that will be the first thread in a web of complete victoriousness. Get one little line of loveliness into your disposition, and that will be the beginning of a spirit which at last will include "whatsoever things are lovely." For a web begun God will send the thread.

There is a beautiful Eastern story of a child walking beside the sea, who saw a bright spangle lying in the sand. She stooped down and picked it up, and found it was attached to a fine thread of gold. As she drew this out of the sand there were other bright spangles on it. She drew up the gold thread, and wound it about her neck, and around her head and her arms and body, until from head to foot she was covered with the bright threads

of gold, and sparkled with the brilliance of the silver spangles. So it is when we lift out of God's word an ornament of beauty to put into our life. We find that other fragments of loveliness, all bound together on the golden chain of love, are attached to the one we have taken up. Then as we draw up the chain and twine it about our neck, and weave it into a web to make a garment for our soul, we find that it is endless. Infinite as God himself is the abundance of the lovely things that we may draw out of the treasury of his grace to deck our life with beauty. "For a web begun God sends the thread."

This same law applies in the learning of all life's lessons. The divine teaching is never wanting; but we must ever begin the lesson with the little we know. We must take the one step that is plain to us, and then God will make plain the next step for us, and the next, and the next. We must not demand to know all the way before we will set out. We must trust Christ, and go on, even in the dark. We must never falter when there seems to be no

path ; as we go on it will open. As we do the will of God we shall know the teaching. When we begin the web, God will send the threads to weave it to the beautiful ending.

CHAPTER VI.

SECRETS OF CONTENTMENT.

“I am glad to think
I am not bound to make the world go right,
But only to discover, and to do with cheerful heart,
The work that God appoints.”

SOME one has said that if men were to be saved by contentment, instead of by faith in Christ, most people would be lost. Yet contentment is a duty. It is also possible. There was one man at least who said, and said it very honestly, “I have learned in whatsoever state I am therein to be content.” His words have special value, too, when we remember in what circumstances they were written. They were dated in a prison, when the writer was wearing a chain. It is easy enough to say such things in the summer days of prosperity; but to say them amid trials and adversities requires a real experience of victorious living.

But what did St. Paul mean when he said, "I am content"? He certainly did not mean that he was satisfied. Contentment is not an indolent giving up to circumstances. It does not come through the dying out of desire and aspiration in the heart. There is a condition of mind which some people suppose to be devout submission to God's will which is anything but Christlike. We are to make the most of our life. We are not to yield irresolutely and weakly to everything that opposes us. Ofttimes we are to resist and conquer what seem to be impossibilities. We are never to be satisfied with our attainments, or our achievements, however fine they may be. Satisfaction is undivine; it is a mark of death, not of life. St. Paul never was satisfied. He lived to the very last day of his life looking forward, and not back — forgetting things behind, and stretching forward to things yet before, eager to do more and achieve more. When he said he had learned to be content, he did not mean that he had ceased to aspire and strive.

The original word, scholars tell us, contains

a fine sense which does not come out in the English translation. It means self-sufficing. St. Paul, as a Christian man, had in himself all that he needed to give him tranquillity and peace, and therefore he was not dependent upon any external circumstances. Wherever he went, there was in him a competence, a fountain of supply, a self-sufficing. This is the true secret of Christian contentment, wherever it is found. We cannot make our own circumstances; we cannot keep away from our life the sickness, the pain, the sorrow, the misfortune; yet as Christians we are meant to live in any and all experiences in unbroken peace, in sweet restfulness of soul.

How may this unbroken content be obtained? St. Paul's description of his own life gives us a hint as to the way he reached it. He says, "I have *learned* to be content." It is no small comfort to us common people to get this from such a man. It tells us that even with him it was not always thus; that at first he probably chafed amid discomforts, and had to "learn" to be contented in trial.

It did not come naturally to him, any more than it does to the rest of us, to have peace in the heart in the time of external strife.

Nor did this beautiful way of living come to him at once, as a divine gift, when he became a Christian. He was not miraculously helped to acquire contentment. It was not a special power or grace granted to him as an apostle. He tells us plainly in his old age that he had "learned" it. This means that he was not always able to say, "I am content in any state." This was an attainment of his later years ; and he reached it by struggle and by discipline, by learning in the school of Christ, by experience, just as all of us have to learn it, if we ever do, and as any of us may learn it if we will.

Surely every one who desires to grow into spiritual beauty should seek to learn this lesson. Discontent is a miserable fault. It grieves God, for it springs from a want of faith in him. It destroys one's own heart-peace, — discontented people are always unhappy. It disfigures beauty of character. It sours the

temper, ruffles the calm of sweet life, and tarnishes the loveliness of the spirit. It even works out through the flesh, and spoils the beauty of the fairest face. To have a transfigured face, one must have heaven in one's heart. Just in proportion as the lesson is learned are the features brightened by the outshining of the indwelling peace. Besides all this, discontent casts shadows on the lives of others. One discontented person in a family often makes a whole household wretched. If not for our own sake, then, we ought at least for the sake of our friends to learn to be contented. We have no right to cast shadows on other lives by our miserable complainings and discontents.

But how can we learn contentment? One step toward it is patient submission to unavoidable ills and hardships. No earthly lot is perfect. No mortal ever yet in this world found a set of circumstances without some drawback. Sometimes, however, it lies in our power to remove the discomfort. Much of our hardship is of our own making. Much of it

would require but a little energy on our own part to cure it. We surely are very foolish if day after day we live on amid ills and frets which we might change for comforts if we would. All removable troubles we ought therefore to remove. Too many people are indolent in resisting hard circumstances and conditions. They give up too readily to what they mis-call divine providences. Obstacles are not always meant to block our way ; oft-times they are intended to inspire us to courage and effort, and thus to bring out our hidden strength. We must not be too quick in submitting to hardness, nor too limp in yielding to circumstances. Some of the things which we find in our way we are to lift out of our way.

But there are trials which we cannot change into pleasures, burdens which we cannot lay down, crosses which we must continue to carry, thorns in the flesh which must remain with their rankling pain. When we have such trials, why should we not sweetly accept them as part of God's best way with us ? Discontent

never made a rough path smoother, a heavy burden lighter, a bitter cup less bitter, a dark way brighter, a sore sorrow less sore. It only makes matters worse. One who accepts with patience that which he cannot change has learned one secret of victorious living.

“Two men toiled side by side from sun to sun,
And both were poor;
Both sat with children, when the day was done,
About their door.

One saw the beautiful in crimson cloud
And shining moon ;
The other, with his head in sadness bowed,
Made night of noon.

One loved each tree and flower and singing bird
On mount or plain ;
No music in the soul of one was stirred
By leaf or rain.

One saw the good in every fellow-man,
And hoped the best ;
The other marvelled at his Master's plan,
And doubt confessed.

One, having heaven above and heaven below,
Was satisfied ;
The other, discontented, lived in woe,
And hopeless died.”

Another part of the lesson is that we moderate our desires. "Having food and raiment," says St. Paul again, "let us therewith be content." Very much of our discontent arises from envy of those who seem to be more favored than ourselves. Many people lose most of the comfort out of their own lot in coveting the finer, more luxurious things some neighbor has. Yet if they knew the whole story of the life they envy for its greater prosperity, they probably would not exchange for it their own lowlier life, with its homelier circumstances. Or if they could make the exchange, it is not likely they would find half so much real happiness in the other position as they would have enjoyed in their own. Contentment does not dwell so often in palaces as in the homes of the humble. The tall peaks rise higher, and are more conspicuous, but the winds smite them more fiercely than they do the quiet vales. And surely the lot in life that God makes for us is always the best that could be made for us for the time. He knows better than we do what our true needs are.

The real cause of our discontent is not in our circumstances ; if it were, a change of circumstances might cure it. It is in ourselves, and wherever we go we shall carry it with us. The only cure that will effect anything must be the curing of the fever of discontent in us.

Envious desires for other people's places which seem finer than our own, prevent our getting the best blessings and good out of our own. Trying to grasp the things that are beyond our reach, we leave unseen, unappreciated, untouched, and despised the many sweet bits of happiness that lie close about us. Some one says, "Stretching his hand to catch the stars, man forgets the flowers at his feet, so beautiful, so fragrant, so multitudinous, and so various." A fine secret of contentment lies in finding and extracting all the pleasure we can get from the things we have, the common, every-day things, while we enter upon no mad, vain chase after impossible fancies. In whatever state we are we may find therein enough for our need.

If we would learn the lesson of content-

ment, we must also train ourselves to live for the higher things of life. One of the ancient wise men, having learned that a storm had destroyed his merchant ships, thus sweeping away all his fortune, said, "It is just as well, for now I can give up my mind more fully to study." He had other and higher sources of enjoyment than his merchandise, and felt the loss of his ships no more than manhood feels the loss of childhood's toys. He was but a heathen philosopher; we are Christians. He had only his studies to occupy his thought when his property was gone; we have all the blessed things of God's love. No earthly misfortune can touch the wealth a Christian holds in the divine promises and hopes.

Just in the measure, therefore, in which we learn to live for spiritual and unseen things, do we find contentment amid earth's trials and losses. If we would live to please God, to build up Christlike character in ourselves, and to lay up treasure in heaven, we shall not depend for happiness on the way things go with us here, nor on the measure of temporal good

we have. The lower desires are crowded out by the higher. We can do without childhood's toys when we have manhood's better possessions. We need this world less as we get more of God and heaven into our hearts.

There is a modern story of a merchant who was devoted to high purposes in life, who was determined to be a man free from bondage to the lower things. One day a ship of his that was coming homeward was delayed. He became anxious, and the next day was yet more troubled, and the third day still more. Then he came to himself, awaking to his true condition of bondage to earthly things, and said, "Is it possible that I have come to love money for itself, and not for its nobler uses?" Taking the value of the ship and its cargo, he gave it to charities, not because he wished to be rid of the money, but because only thus could he get the conquest over himself, holding his love of money under his feet. He was learning well one secret of contentment.

St. Paul knew this secret. He cheerfully gave up all that this world had for him. Money

had no power over him. He knew how to live in plenty; but he did not fret when want came instead. He was content in any trial, because earth meant so little and Christ meant so much to him. He did not need the things he did not have; he was not made poor by the things he lost; he was not vexed by the sufferings he had to endure, because the sources of his life were in heaven, and could not be touched by earthly experiences of pain or loss. George MacDonald's words are very true: "In life, troubles will come which look as if they would never pass away. The night and the storm look as if they would last forever, but the calm and the morning cannot be stopped. The storm in its very nature is transient. The effort of nature, as that of the human heart, ever is to return to repose; for God is peace."

"We bless thee for thy peace, O God,
Deep as the soundless sea,
Which falls like sunshine on the road
Of those who trust in thee;

That peace which suffers and is strong,
Trusts where it cannot see;
Deems not the trial way too long,
But leaves the end with thee."

These are hints of the way we may learn in whatsoever state we are, therein to be content. Surely the lesson is worth learning! One year of sweet content amid earth's troublous scenes is better than a whole lifetime of vexed, restless discontent. The lesson can be learned, too, by any one who is truly Christ's disciple; for did not the Master say, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you"?

The artist painted life as a dark, storm-swept sea, covered with wrecks. Then out of the midst of the wild waves he made to rise a great rock, in a cleft of which, high up, amid herbage and flowers, he painted a dove sitting quietly on her nest. It is a picture of Christian peace in the midst of this world's strifes and storms. In the cleft of the Rock is the home of content.

CHAPTER VII.

OUR UNANSWERED PRAYERS.

“O tired heart !
God knows,
Not you nor I
Who reach our hands for gifts
That wise hands must deny.

We blunder where we fain would do our best,
Until a-weary ; then we cry, ‘ Do thou the rest !
And in his hands the tangled threads we place
Of our poor blind weaving, with a shamèd face.
All trust of ours he sacredly will keep ;
So, tired heart, God knows ; go thou to work or sleep.”

THERE are times when God seems to be silent to us. To our earnest supplications he answers not a word. We are told to ask and we shall receive — to seek, and we shall find — to knock, and it shall be opened unto us. Yet there come times when we ask imploringly, and seem not to receive ; when, though we seek with intense eagerness, we seem not to find ; when we knock until our hands are bruised and bleeding, and there seems to be

no opening of the door. Sometimes the heavens appear to be brass above us as we ask, "Is there anywhere an ear to hear our pleadings? Is there anywhere a heart to feel sympathy with us in our need?"

Nothing is so awful as this silence of God — to feel that communication with him is cut off. It is a pathetic prayer in which a psalm-writer pleads: "Be not silent to me, lest I become like them that go down into the pit." Anything from God is better than that he be silent to us. It would be a sad, dreary, lonely world if the atheist's creed were true, — that there is no God; that there is no ear to hear our prayer; that no voice of answering help or love or comfort ever comes out of heaven for us.

Are prayers ever unanswered? There are many prayers which are answered, although we do not know it, and still think them unanswered. The answer is not recognized when it comes. This is true of our common mercies and favors. We pray every morning, "Give us this day our daily bread," and then we never think of our three meals each day as

being answers to prayer. We ask God for health, for raiment, for the things we need, for prosperity in business, for friends ; all these things come to us in continuity, without break. But do we remember that we prayed for them, and that they come from God as answers to our requests ?

The same is true of many of the spiritual blessings which we seek. We ask for holiness. It does not seem to us that we are advancing in holiness ; but all the while our life is imperceptibly and unconsciously receiving more of the mind and spirit of Christ, and we are being changed into his image. We expect the answer in a marked way, while it comes silently, as the dew comes upon the drooping flowers and withering leaves. But, like the flowers and the leaves, our soul is refreshed and our life is renewed.

We put our cares into God's hands in prayer, and they do not seem to become less. We think there has been no answer to our supplications. But all the while an unseen hand has been quietly shaping, adjusting, and

disentangling for us the complex affairs of our life which made us anxious. We are not conscious of it, but our prayers have been receiving continual answer in peace and blessing.

We find ourselves in the midst of circumstances which appear adverse to our happiness and good. We seem about to be crushed by sorrows, by disappointments, by trials, or by antagonisms. We pray to be saved from these distressful conditions. No answer seems to come. The shadow deepens ; the blows fall. We sit in the darkness, and say that God did not answer our prayers. We are unaware of the blessing that really came to us in the time of our pain. The cup was not taken away ; but we were secretly strengthened, so that we were able to drink it.

We are very ignorant. We know not how to pray as we ought. The thing we ask for is not just what we need, although we think it is. The thing we really need comes in place of what we thought we needed. The prayer seems to be unanswered, while in fact it is answered in a far better way than if what we

sought had come instead. We think it is more of God's gifts we need ; these do not come, but God himself comes into our life in new fulness, imparting to us more of his love and grace. We have an answer better than we sought. The Giver is better than his best gifts.

Thus, there is a large field of praying in which answers come, but come unrecognized. We have been blessed, although we knew it not. We did not perceive the blessing when it was given to us. We did not understand that the good things we were receiving so plentifully were answers to our prayers. We thought God was not heeding our requests, when really he was giving us abundant answer every day.

But there are other prayers that really are not answered. God is silent to us when we ask. Yet there is a reason for his silence. It is better we should not have the things we want and plead for. For example, we ask God to lift away our burdens. But to do this would rob us of blessings which can come to us only

through the bearing of the burden ; and our Father loves us too well to give us present ease at the cost of future and eternal good. There are mistaken notions current about the way God promises to help us. People think that whenever they have a little trouble to endure, a bit of hard path to go over, a load to carry, a sorrow to meet, or a trial of any kind, all they have to do is to call upon God, and he will at once deliver them, take away the burden or the sorrow that threatens, free them from trial. They think that is what God promises to do. They imagine that when anything goes a little wrong with them, all they have to do is to pray, and God will set it right. But this is not the manner of God's love. His purpose concerning us is not to make things easy for us, but to make something of us.

So when we pray to God to save us from all care, to take the struggles out of our life, to make the paths mossy, to lift away all loads, he simply will not do it. It would be most unloving in him to do so. Prayers of this kind, therefore, go unanswered. We must

carry the burden ourselves. God wants us to learn life's lessons, and to do this we must be left to work out the problems for ourselves. There are rich blessings that can be gotten only in sorrow. It would be a short-sighted love, indeed, that would heed our cries and spare us from the sorrow because we cried for this, thus depriving us of the wonderful blessings which can be gotten only in the sorrow.

A child may indolently shrink from the study, the regular hours, the routine, the drudgery, and the discipline of the school, begging the parent to let him stay at home from school and have an easy time ; but what would you think of the father who would weakly and softly grant the child's request, releasing him from the tasks which irk him so ? Nothing more unkind could be done. The result would be the dwarfing of the child's life for all the future. Is God less wisely kind than our human fathers ? He will not answer prayers which ask that we may be freed from duty or from work, since it is by these very things

we grow. The only true answer in such prayers is the non-granting of what we ask.

Then, there are also selfish prayers that are unanswered. Human lives are tied up together. It is not enough that any one of us shall think only of himself and his own things. Thoughts of others must modify all our life. It is possible to overlook this in our prayers, and to press our own interests and desires to the harming of others. God's eye takes in all his children, and he plans for the truest and best good of each one of them. Our selfish prayers, which would work to the injury of others, he will not answer. This limitation applies especially to prayers for earthly things. We must not pray selfishly even for prosperity in business. We must not ask for our own comfort and ease, without qualification. Love must come into our praying as well as our living. Or if we forget love's law, and think only of ourselves in our asking, God will not grant us our desires. He thinks of all his children, and will not do injury or harm to one to gratify another.

These are examples of prayers that are not answered. They are not according to God's will. They are for things that would not prove blessings to us if we were to receive them.

There is yet another class of prayers which appear to be unanswered, but whose answer is only delayed for wise reasons. Ofttimes we are not able at the moment to receive the things we ask for. A child in one of the lower grades in a school may go to a teacher of higher studies, and ask to be taught this or that branch. The teacher may be willing to impart to the pupil the knowledge of the higher study, but the pupil cannot receive the knowledge until he has gone through certain other studies to prepare him for it. There are spiritual qualities for which we may pray earnestly, but which can be received only after certain discipline. A ripened character cannot be gotten by a young Christian merely in answer to prayer; it can be gotten only through long experience.

Or it may be that the things we pray for

cannot be given to us until they have been prepared for us. Suppose you were to plant a young fruit-tree, and were to begin to pray for fruit from its branches ; could your prayer be answered at once ? It is thus with many things we ask for in our pleading, — they must be grown before they can be given to us. God delays to answer, that he may give us in the end better things than could have been given at the beginning. He seems silent to us when we plead ; but it is not the silence of indifference, nor the silence of refusal, but the silence of love, that really assents to our request, and sets about preparing for us the blessings we crave. We need only patience to wait our Father's time.

Here it is that ofttimes we fail. We cannot wait for God. We think he is indifferent to us because he does not instantly give us what we crave. We fret and vex ourselves over the unanswering of the very prayers which God is really answering as speedily as the blessings can be made ready for us, or as we can be made ready to receive them. We should

teach ourselves to trust our Father in all that concerns our prayers, — what he will give, what he shall withhold, and the time and the manner of his giving.

These are suggestions concerning what seem to be unanswered prayers. The prayers may have been answered in ways in which we did not recognize our requests. They may be, indeed, unanswered, because to answer them would have been unkindness to us, or would have wrought hurt to others. Or the answers may have been delayed until we are made ready to receive them, or while God is preparing them for us.

An Eastern story tells of one who was discouraged because his prayers seemed not to be answered. An enemy taunted him, bidding him call louder; but a heavenly message brought him comfort, assuring him that his prayer to God really had the answer in itself.

“‘Allah, Allah!’ cried the sick man, racked with pain the long night through:

Till with prayer his heart was tender, till his lips like honey grew.

But at morning came the Tempter; said, 'Call louder,
child of pain!

See if Allah ever hear, or answer, "Here am I" again.'

Like a stab, the cruel cavil through his brain and pulses
went;

To his heart an icy coldness, to his brain a darkness, sent.

Then before him stands Elias; says, 'My child! why thus
dismayed?

Dost repent thy former fervor? Is thy soul of prayer
afraid?'

'Ah!' he cried, 'I've called so often; never heard the
"Here am I;"

And I thought, God will not pity, will not turn on me his
eye.'

Then the grave Elias answered, 'God said, "Rise, Elias,
go, —

Speak to him, the sorely tempted; lift him from his gulf of
woe.

Tell him that his very longing is itself an answering cry;
That his prayer, 'Come, gracious Allah,' is my answer,
'Here am I.'"

"Every inmost inspiration is God's angel undefiled;
And in every 'O my Father!' slumbers deep a 'Here, my
child!'"

CHAPTER VIII.

FOR THE PEOPLE WHO FAIL.

“God sets some souls in shade alone ;
They have no daylight of their own —
Only in lives of happier ones
They see the shine of distant suns.

God knows. Content thee with thy night.
Thy greater heaven hath grander light.
To-day is close. The hours are small ;
Thou sitt’st afar, and hast them all.

Lose the best joy — that doth but blind ;
Reach forth a larger bliss to find.
To-day is brief ; the inclusive spheres
Rain raptures of a thousand years.”

It is quite time some strong words should be spoken for the people who fail. There are enough to sing the praises of those who succeed. When a man is valiant, and overcomes in the battle, and stands a victor at the close of the strife, there are enough to shout the huzzas, and to twine the laurel for his brow. When a man prospers in business, rising to

wealth and influence, living in splendor, there are enough to do homage to his achievements. When one has won honor in any calling, attaining eminence and distinction, as in art or in a profession, there is no lack of voices to speak commendation. Books are written, telling the stories of heroes who won great victories on land or sea. Poets weave their verses into garlands of honor for those who conquer in the world's battles. We have many volumes filled with the world's records of men who became famous, and women who became famous, rising from obscurity to greatness.

All this is well. But who tells the story of those who fail? Who sings the praises of him who goes down in the fight? Who tells of the heroism of him who is defeated in the battle, and falls wounded and overwhelmed? When the struggle is over, and the victors come out of the smoke and carnage in triumph, there is a jubilant shout to greet them; but who lifts up the cheer for the men who fell and died on the field? Yet were they any less brave than those who came unwounded from

the strife? Did the honor of the victory belong any less to them than to those who lived to hear the shout of conquest?

In all departments of life there are a few who seem to succeed, while the many seem to fail. Have all those who sink down, weary and broken-hearted, who fall out of the ranks, unable to keep up in the swift march, who do not get on in business, whose hopes are disappointed, and who drop in the dust of defeat, — have all those who seem to fail really failed?

“While the voice of the world shouts its chorus—its pæan
—for those who have won;
While the trumpet is sounding triumphant, and high to the
breeze and the sun
Glad banners are waving, hands clapping, and hurrying feet
Thronging after the laurel-crowned victors, I stand on the
field of defeat,
In the shadow with those who are fallen, and wounded and
dying, and there
Chant a requiem low, place my hand on their pain-knotted
brow, breathe a prayer,
Hold the hand that is helpless, and whisper: ‘They only the
victory win
Who have fought the good fight, and have vanquished the
demon who tempts us within;

Who have held to their faith unseduced by the prize that the world holds on high;

Who have dared for a high cause to suffer, resist, fight,—
if need be to die.’ ”

When a great building is to be erected, deep excavations are made, and piles of stones are laid down in the darkness, only to be covered up and hidden out of sight by the imposing superstructure which rises high into the air. This foundation work receives no praise. It is not even seen by any human eye. It appears in a sense to be wasted work; yet we know that without it there would be no massive buildings towering in majestic proportions in the air. So, many men's lives seem to be failures, while in reality they have been built into the foundations of great temples. Their work is covered up and hidden out of sight, and makes no show before the world; but without it those who come after them could not have achieved the success which makes their names bright.

For a whole generation men are experimenting along some line; for example, in

electricity. Some of them almost succeed. They seem to be on the very edge of achieving what they are seeking; but success persistently and narrowly eludes them, and they die at last, broken-hearted over their failure. Then a new man arises, and takes the results of their experiments as a starting-point. He is successful, and all the world rings with his praises; yet he never could have brought the invention to this triumphant issue but for the long, patient experimenting of those who went before him, toiling, sacrificing — failing. Nearly every great discovery or invention that has proved a boon to the world, had a long history of such effort and failure behind its final success. Who will say that the men who wrought thus so unselfishly in obscurity, and without result or reward, really failed? They did their part in preparing the way. Their work was essential in its place. Should they not share the songs of victory which the world sings for the man who at last brings the invention to triumphant completion?

Recently a man, prospecting in the mining

regions of Arizona, found a remarkable natural bridge. It spans a deep cañon, forty-five feet in width. The bridge is made by a great agatized tree that lies across the gorge. Scientific men say that many ages since this tree was prostrated by some terrific storm, and fell across the cañon. By the effects of the water and of time, it has passed through many stages of mineralization, and is now a wonderful tree of solid agate. And there it lies, making an agate bridge over which men may pass from side to side. This tree seemed to be a failure when, that day in its prime, it was broken off by the storm and hurled to the ground. But, instead of being a failure, to what nobler use could it have been put than thus to become a bridge of agate, to stand for ages, and on which countless human feet may walk across the chasm?

This fallen tree is an illustration of countless human lives which have fallen and seemed to fail, but which in time have proved to be bridges over which others can walk to honor, success, and triumph. We are all daily pass-

ing over bridges built of the toils, sacrifices, and failures of those who have gone before us. The luxury, ease, and comfort we now enjoy cost other men tears, pain, and loss. We cross continually to our blessings and privileges, our promised lands, our joys, on the bridges built for us by those who failed.

“And I say again, Count you the cost
Of this bridge? To what is it nailed?
What are its bulwarks piled high—these
You cross to the city of ease?
Man, I tell you, 'tis built on the failed—
The fighters who lost.

Dryshod you reach your promised land now
On their failure—on those the world railed—
They the stuff of whom heroes are—
Who saw its light gleam from valleys afar,
And fought for it—died for it—failed—
No failure, I vow.”

Christ himself is the greatest example of this truth. His life was a failure as seen on the world-side. At three and thirty it was all over, the brightest light that ever shone on the earth quenched in the darkness of the cross. But now it is a bridge of agate,

over which millions are passing from sin to holiness, from sorrow to joy, from death to life, from earth to heaven. Christ said, "I am the way No man cometh unto the Father but by me." So his failure became the saving of the world. It built the bridge over the chasm between earth and heaven, on which all who are saved pass over. We live because he died.

So in smaller measure is it with thousands of human lives. They fail. They sink down in the dust and are forgotten. Their names are lost in the indistinguishable multitude. No fame, no remembrance, is theirs. But without them the world would have missed a portion of its blessing, and many lives, honored now, would have missed their honor. Many a man is living to-day in bright happiness—prosperous, successful, enjoying distinction—because his parents toiled, sacrificed, and—failed. None of us know what we owe to the past,—to those who have gone before us, to the lives that sank down in unmarked obscurity. They labored, and we are entered into their labors.

It is doubtful if any good man can make the most possible of his life in a worldly pursuit and yet be a loyal Christian. He may have brilliant powers, all the qualities that lead to success. If he were to devote all his energies without reserve to his chosen business, he could outstrip all his competitors, and win the highest place. But he is a Christian; and a Christian cannot live for this world's ambition alone, though he do it honestly and honorably, and though the ambition be altogether worthy, and yet be altogether faithful to his Master. He must serve his fellow-men as he passes through life. He must be as Christ to the weary and stumbling ones. He must turn aside oft-times, like the good Samaritan in his journey, to help those who are in need, whose cries break upon his ear. He may not press on in his ambition, heedless of love's duties.

Then, while he thus stays his feet to do service to those who need sympathy and help, his competitors in the race, not troubling themselves to heed the calls of distress about them, thinking only of winning the goal, gain upon

him, and pass him by. Men say he is foolish thus to permit himself to fail through his heart's tenderness and sympathy. But that is not failure which comes through pausing to comfort and bless others. Rather it is such ministries as these that alone redeem an earthly life from utter failure. The man who steels his heart against all appeals for pity and help, and goes remorselessly on to the goal of his ambition, without turning aside at the calls of need, finds no blessing in that which he achieves. But he who seeks first the kingdom of God, stopping in his busiest days to do good, and turning aside from his most ardent pursuits to minister to human want or sorrow, though his hands hold less of this world at the end, will be rich in the rewards of love's service.

Not every good man succeeds in worldly affairs. Not every true effort that is made has apparent success. Sometimes it is by failure that a man can do his best. Success in the undertaking can come only after many have sunk down without attaining. Nearly

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always the first prophets and heralds of a new reform must perish in defeat, thus preparing the way, building the bridge over the chasm, for those who come after them to carry the reform to success. But surely it is just as glorious to do one's part in the essential preparatory stages, and then fall without sharing the victory, as it is to have one's part at the last among the victors.

We may set it down as an unalterable truth, however, that there can be no real failure when one is faithful to God and to duty. Sin is always a failure. The apparent success that men build up through unrighteousness is only a gilded picture. It has no foundation, no substance. It is an illusion. It will vanish in the presence of the divine judgment, as the morning mists vanish before the rising sun. But whatever men build up in truth and right is real as God himself. All truth is part of God, and is imperishable. No failure is possible when we work with God. "He that doeth the will of God abideth forever." Nothing may seem to come from the toil, the sacri-

fice, and the outpouring of precious life; but sometime, somehow, somewhere, there will be a harvest from every sowing. Not one grain of the holy seed of love can ever be lost. The life may sink away, and seem to have perished; but from its grave will come an influence which will be a blessing in the world. We need not care what we do, nor where we go, nor what comes of our work, if only we do God's will.

It is sweet to see the blessing come from our serving, to gather the fruit from our sowing, to witness the success of our work, if that be God's will for us; but whether we have this privilege or not, it is a comfort to know that nothing done in truth for God can ever fail, and that no service rendered in Christ's name can be in vain.

“I know that love never is wasted,
Nor truth, nor the breath of a prayer;
And the thought that goes forth as a blessing
Must live as a joy in the air.”

CHAPTER IX.

THE SIN OF NOT PRAYING FOR OTHERS.

Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep and goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.

TENNYSON.

THERE is a Scripture word which suggests to us in a striking way the importance of praying for others. Samuel had been set aside by the people in their eagerness to have a king. For a moment their consciences were awakened to a sense of their sin ; and they came to him, as they had done so often before, with a request that he would pray for them. His answer was : "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you."

Perhaps we are not accustomed to think of praying for others in just this way, as a duty, the omission of which is a sin against God. We think of it as a privilege, but scarcely as a part of love's solemn duty. We are in danger of narrowing our prayers to ourselves and our own wants. We think of our own sorrows and trials, our own duties, our own work, our own spiritual growth, and too often do not look out of the window upon our friend's rough path or sore struggle. But selfishness in praying is one of the worst forms of selfishness. If ever love reaches its best and purest, it ought to be when we are standing before God.

Or our ceasing to pray for our friends may be from want of deep, earnest thought concerning them. We pray for them when they are sick or in sore trouble, but at other times we are not impressed with the truth that they need our prayers. Their wants or perils are not apparent to us. They seem to be happy. There is nothing of which we are aware in their life that appeals to our sympathy. We

see only the surface, and are oblivious to their deeper necessities or dangers. We forget that they are souls with immortal needs ; that they have enemies whom we cannot see, who are seeking their hurt continually ; that in this vast, complex life there are a thousand influences touching them which tend to work them injury ; that only the hand of Christ can safely lead them through this perilous life ; that they are to live forever, and that they have interests which project into eternity. We are apt to forget that our bright, happy, gentle, attractive friends without Christ are without true hope. We need to think of these deeper spiritual needs of those about us, lest we cease to pray for them, and so sin against God.

Another reason why some cease to pray for their friends is, that answers to prayers already offered in their behalf have been so long delayed. There are mothers, for example, who for weary years have been pleading for the salvation of children who still remain impenitent. In the unanswering of their supplications they lose faith and hope, and their prayer

languishes. The same is true of other prayers. Hearts fail in the long delays.

But deferred answers should not chill the warmth and earnestness of our asking. Delays are not refusals. God has his own time and way of granting our requests for others as well as for ourselves. There are some blessings it takes a great while to prepare. They are like fruit which cannot ripen until their season comes, and to give them at once would only be to put into our hand that which is unripe and unwholesome. There are purposes which God is working out in our friend's life through the sorrow, the loss, or the burden, which cannot be completed if our prayers are answered at once. It was more than twenty years before Jacob saw his prayers for his lost boy answered. We should not cease to pray because the answer tarries. Perhaps the coming of the blessing at last will depend upon our faithful continuance in prayer. If we faint, it will not come. It is a sad thing if deferred answers cause any of us to cease to pray for a careless friend. That is giving

him up; and when we give him up, and cease to make supplication for him, what hope has he remaining? There are no other chains to bind him about the feet of God.

Another reason why some persons cease to pray for those they have prayed for before, is something in these friends, or in their conduct, that has hurt or grieved them. There seemed such a reason in Samuel's case. He had given all his life to the interests of his people. He had spent all his years in serving them. It was good service too, — service which brought incalculable blessing to the nation. Yet in his old age, when his hair had grown gray, he was set aside by the people he had served so loyally and so unselfishly. Samuel might have ceased now to pray for the people who had proved so ungrateful to him, and had treated him so unkindly; and he would have seemed to do right. They did not deserve to be longer loved and remembered in his prayers, he might have argued justly. Many men would have grown bitter against the people who had so treated them.

Instead of this, however, Samuel says he will not cease to pray for them; that it would be a sin against God for him to do this. No wrong treatment of him by them could absolve him from his duty of praying for them. Thus he exemplified the spirit of that love which found its complete revealing only in Christ.

Our duty of intercession is not limited to those who are kind and faithful to us. Any man can pray for those who are generous and loyal to him. But the sin of which Samuel spoke was ceasing to pray for those who had treated him most unworthily. The lesson for us is no less wide in its reach. We may not strike from our prayer-list those who have treated us with injustice or bitterness. Our Lord commands us to pray for those who spitefully use us. We sin against God if we cease to pray for the man who has harmed us and done us evil.

Why is it so important that we should pray for others? Why is it a sin to cease to pray for any? Why is prayer so important a duty?

Have we a real obligation to pray for others? Friendship without prayer lacks a vital quality. There is no other duty of friendship which rests upon us with deeper obligation than this of intercession. We know that we sin both against God and against our friend when we cease to show him kindness in word and deed. No kindnesses shown in act are so important and so essential a part of friendship as prayer for our friend.

“Yes, pray for whom thou lovest; if uncounted wealth
were thine,
The treasures of the boundless deep, the riches of the mine,
Thou couldst not to thy cherished friends a gift so dear
impart,
As the earnest benediction of a deeply prayerful heart.

Seek not the worldling's friendship; it shall droop and
wane ere long
In the cold and heartless glitter of the pleasure-loving
throng;
But seek the friend who, when thy prayer for him shall
murmured be,
Breathes forth in faithful sympathy a fervent prayer for
thee.”

Samuel said it would be a sin against the

Lord for him to cease praying for the people. It would be failing in a duty, and that is always a sin against God. We are to represent God in this world. He never ceases to love and care for his children. He is kind to the unthankful and the evil. He wants us to have the same spirit toward others that he has, — to be always interested in them. For us to be indifferent to the good of any human being is ungodlike. To cease to pray for any one is to fail in part of our duty.

Then, God has ordained that many of his blessings shall come to his children through prayer. He is ready to bestow upon them the favors of his love; but he would be inquired of to do it for them. He says, "Ask, and ye shall receive." That is, the gifts are within our reach, but they must be claimed; they wait to be sought. This is true of good things, both for ourselves and for others. We do not know how much we miss of the grace and help and fulness of life which God has in store for us, simply because we do not ask more largely. When we cease to pray for

ourselves, or when we ask only little things, we impoverish our life.

The same is true of prayer for others. God has blessings manifold for our children, — blessings which he is eager to put into their lives ; but we must ask him for them. If we do not, the blessing will not be bestowed, and the responsibility for their missing it will be ours. We have illustrations of this in the stories of Christ's healings. Fathers and mothers came with their sick children, and at first they could not be cured because the parents had not faith. No doubt in many homes to-day children fail at least of fullest, richest blessing because of their parents' unbelief or small faith. Then, what shall we say of the altogether prayerless homes, where fathers and mothers love their children deeply and tenderly, and yet bow no knee in supplication for them? What a sad, irreparable wrong they inflict upon their children's lives ! For the world is very full of peril for young lives. We grieve when a child dies ; but we should remember that it is our living children who are really

in danger, not our dead, who are safe with God.

“ Lord, we can trust thee for our holy dead;
They, underneath the shadow of thy tomb,
Have entered into peace; with bended head
We thank thee for their rest, and for our lightened gloom.

But, Lord, our living! who on stormy seas
Of sin and sorrow still are tempest-tost!
Our dead have reached their haven; but for these, —
Teach us to trust thee, Lord, for these, our loved and lost.

For these we make our passion-prayer at night;
For these we cry to thee through the long day!”

The lesson is for all as well as for parents. Through prayer is God's ordained way of receiving blessings. God has comfort for men's sorrows; but you and I who see our friends in their grief must reach out our hands, and bring down the comfort by our intercession.

There is a Bible story of a battle between the Israelites and the Amalekites. Moses was on a hill-top, overlooking the conflict. While he held up his hands Israel prevailed; but when his hands grew weary and heavy, and sank down, the battle went against Israel. Our

friends are in the valley in sore conflict. While our hands are lifted up in intercession they are victorious ; but if we cease to pray for them, they falter and fail.

We do not know how much the blessing and saving of others depend upon our praying for them. We do not know how often men's failures, defeats, and falls are due to our having ceased to pray for them. We stand between God and needy lives, and are bidden to give ourselves no rest, but to cry continually to him for those about us. The healing of the world is in our intercessory prayer.

CHAPTER X.

ON GROWING OLD SUCCESSFULLY.

“ Old — are we growing old ?
Life blooms as we travel on
Up the hills, into fresh, lovely dawn ;
We are children who do but begin
The sweetness of life to win.
Because heaven is in us, to bud and unfold,
We are younger for growing old ! ”

A GREAT deal of advice is given to young people. Sermons are preached to them. Books are written for them, filled with counsels. No doubt the young need wise advice, solemn preaching, and paternal counsel. The world has many dangers for youth. Besides, character is formed into permanence in the early days. When this period has been safely passed through, guardian angels begin to breath more freely. Their solicitude relaxes.

But youth is not the only stage of life which has perils ; each period has its own. A great

many men break down at mid-life. Many whose youth and early manhood gave brightest promise fail utterly in some crisis when at their very strongest. Not all the wrecks of life occur in the early days. A majestic tree fell at its prime,—fell on a calm evening, when there was scarcely a breath of air stirring. It had withstood a century of storms, and now was broken off by a zephyr. The secret was disclosed in its falling. A boy's hatchet had been struck into it when it was a tender sapling. The wound had been grown over and hidden away under exuberant life, but it had never healed. There at the heart of the tree it stayed, a spot of decay, ever eating a little farther and deeper into the trunk, until at last the tree was rotted through, and fell of its own weight, when it seemed to be at its best. So do many lives fall when they seem to be at their strongest, because some sin or fault of youth has left its wounding and its consequent weakness at the heart. For many years it is hidden, and life goes on in strength. At last, however, its sad work is done, and at his prime the man falls.

One might suppose, however, that good old age, at least, is safe from moral danger. It has weathered the storms of many long years. It has passed through the experimental stages. The passions of youth have been brought under masterful control. Life is sobered, quiet, steady, strong, with ripened character, tried and secure principles, and with rich experience. So we congratulate the old man on having gotten well through life, where he can at last enjoy the blessings of restful years.

But really old age has perils of its own, which are quite as grave in their way as those of youth. Sometimes it does not fulfil the prophecy and the promise of the earlier years. Some men who live nobly and richly until they have passed the meridian of their days, lose in the beauty and splendor of their character, and in the sweetness of their spirit, as they move toward the sunset.

Old age has its temptations and perils. It is hard to bear the honors of a good and worthy life, and not be spoiled by them, as they gather about the head when the years

multiply. Some old men grow vain when they hear their names mentioned with honor, and when their good deeds are applauded. It is hard to keep the heart humble, and the life simple and gentle, when one stands amid the successes, the achievements, the ripened fruits, of many years of struggle, toil, and sacrifice, in the days of a prosperous old age. Some old men become self-conceited — quite too conscious of the good they have done, and the honor that gathers about their head. They grow garrulous, especially about themselves and their own part in the achievements of the past. They like to tell the stories of the things they have done.

The ease and freedom from care which sometimes come as the fitting reward of a life of hardship, self-denial, struggle, and toil, do not always prove the most healthful conditions, or those in which the character appears at its best. Some men who were splendid in incessant action, when carrying heavy loads, meeting large responsibilities, and enduring sore trials, are not nearly so

noble when they have been compelled to lay down their burdens, drop their tasks out of their hands, and step out of the crowding, surging ranks into the quiet ways of those whose great life-work is mainly finished. They chafe at standing still. Their peace is broken in the very days when it ought to be the calmest and sweetest.

They are unwilling to confess that they are growing old, and to yield their places of responsibility and care to younger men. Too often they make the mistake of overstaying their own greatest usefulness in positions which they have filled with fidelity and success in the past, but which, with their own waning powers, they can no longer fill acceptably and well as heretofore. In this respect old age puts life to a severe test. It is the part of true wisdom in a man, as he advances in years, to recognize the fact that he can no longer continue to carry all the burdens that he bore in the days of his strength, nor do all the work that he did when he was in his life's prime.

Sometimes old age grows unhappy and discontented. We cannot wonder at this. It becomes lonely, as one by one its sweet friendships and close companionships fall off in the resistless desolation which death produces. The hands that have always been so busy are left well-nigh empty. It is not easy to keep sweet and gentle-spirited when a man must stand aside and see others take up and do the things he used to do himself, and when he must walk alone where in former years his life was blessed with tender human companionships. Broken health also comes in, oftentimes, as a burden of old age, which adds to the difficulty of the problem of beautiful living.

These are some of the reasons why old age is a truer and sorer testing-time of character than youth or mid-life. New perils come with this period. Many men who live nobly and victoriously in the days of active struggle and hard toil, fail in the days of quiet and ease. While busy, and under pressure of duty, they prove true and faithful; but they

fail in the time of leisure, when the pressure is withdrawn.

We should set ourselves the task, however, of living nobly and victoriously to the very close of life. We should make the whole day of life beautiful, to its last moments. The late afternoon should be as lovely, with its deep, serious blue, and its holy, restful quiet, as the forenoon, with its stir and freshness, and its splendor and sunshine; and the sun-setting should be as glorious with its amber and gold as the sunrising with its glow and radiance.

The old, and those who are growing old, should never feel for a moment that their work, even their best work, is done, when they can no longer march and keep step in the columns with youth and strong manhood. The work of the later and riper years is just as important as that of the earlier years. It is not the same work, but it is no less essential in the world. "Young men for action, old men for counsel," said the great philosopher. The life that one may live in the

quieter time, when the rush and the strife are left behind, may be even more lovely, more Christlike, more helpful, than was the life of the more exciting, stirring time that is gone.

It may mean more in results, in real fruitage, though lacking in stir and noise. Here is a parable of a beautiful old age:—

“Yon is the apple-tree,
Joints all shrunk like an old man’s knee,
Gaping trunk half eaten away,
Crumbling visibly day by day;
Branches dead or dying fast,
Topmost limb like a splintered mast;
Yet behold in the prime of May,
How it blooms in the sweet old way!

Heart of it brave and warm,
Spite of many a wintry storm,
Throbbing still with the deep desire,
Burning still with the eager fire,
Striving still with the zeal and truth
Of the gladsome morning days of youth;
Still to do and to be, forsooth,
Something worthy of Him whose care,
Summer or winter, failed it ne’er.
This is motive for you and me,
When we grow old like the apple-tree.”

The pathway of the righteous is compared to the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. A good life ought to grow more and more beautiful every day. The task of sweet, useful living is no less a duty when one has gotten through the years of mid-life, into the borders of old age, than it was in the days of strength. A man should not slacken his diligence, earnestness, faithfulness, prayerfulness, or his faith in Christ, until he has come to the very gate of eternity.

One of the perils of old age is just at this point. A man feels that his work is done, his character is matured, his reputation is established; and he is tempted to grow careless, as if it could not now matter much what he does or what he leaves undone. This is an error which sometimes proves very costly. There have been old men who in their very last years, for lack of the accustomed wisdom or restraint, have marred the beauty which through all their life their hands had been diligently and painstakingly fashioning.

Sometimes the fabric of a whole life-work is torn down in a few days or months of foolishness, when the watch is taken off the life, and discipline is relaxed.

We are not done with life in this world until the hands have been folded on the breast in their final repose; therefore we should not slacken our diligence for an instant. We should make the last moments beautiful with trust and faith and sweet patience and quiet peace and earnest usefulness, dying beautifully. Robert Browning says in "Rabbi Ben Ezra," —

"Grow old along with me!

The best is yet to be,

The last of life, for which the first was made.

Our times are in his hand

Who saith, 'A whole I planned.'

Youth shows but half; trust God, see all, nor be afraid."

How shall we live so that we shall be sure of a successful and beautiful old age? For one thing, all the life, from youth up, must be true and worthy. Old age is the harvest of all the years. It is the time when whatsoever we

have sown we shall also reap. Wasted years, too, give a harvest — a harvest of regret and sorrow, of unhappy memories, and remorseful self-accusings. We are building the house, all along the years, in which we must live when we grow old. The old man may change neighbors or change countries, but he cannot get away from himself.

To have a golden harvest, we must sow good seeds. To have sweet memories, we must live purely, unselfishly, thoughtfully, with reverence for God and love for man. We must fill our hearts with the harmonies of love and truth along the years, if in the silence of old age we would listen to songs of gladness and peace.

The old should never let duties drop out of their hands. Duties may not be the same when years have brought feebleness, but every day to the close brings something for the hands to do. No old man has earned the right to be useless, even for a day. The old should never cease to look forward for the best of life. The year we are now living we should always make better than any year that is past. It was an old man,

with martyrdom imminent, who gave as his theory of life the forgetting of things that are past, and the stretching forth to things that are before.

Such a life never grows old. Even at four-score it is "eighty years young," not eighty years old. It is a beautiful fancy that in heaven the oldest are the youngest, since all life is toward immortal youth. Why may it not be so of the good on earth? We need not grow old. We can keep our heart young — our feelings, affections, yearnings, and hopes young. Then old age will indeed be the best of life — life's ripeness, life's time of coronation.

"It is a favorite speculation of mine," said Dr. Chalmers, "that if spared to sixty years of age, we then enter the seventh decade of human life, and that this, if possible, should be turned into the Sabbath of our earthly pilgrimage, and spent sabbatically, as if on the shores of an eternal world, or, as it were, in the outer courts of the temple that is above, the tabernacle that is in heaven."

This is a beautiful thought, with a suggestion

which must commend itself to many devout people drawing toward old age. It does not imply a decade of idleness, or of selfish ease, but such a use of the life in its ripeness and richness of experience as shall shed upon the world the benignest influence and the holiest benediction.

“ Old — we are growing old:

Going on through a beautiful road,
Finding earth a more blessed abode;
Nobler work by our hands to be wrought,
Freer paths for our hope and our thought;
Because of the beauty the years unfold,
We are cheerfully growing old.

Old — we are growing old:

Going up where the sunshine is clear;
Watching grander horizons appear
Out of clouds that enveloped our youth;
Standing firm on the mountains of truth;
Because of the glory the years unfold,
We are joyfully growing old.

Old — we are growing old:

Going into the gardens of rest
That glow through the gold of the west,
Where the rose and the amaranth blend,
And each path is the way to a friend;
Because of the peace that the years unfold,
We are thankfully growing old.”

CHAPTER XI.

AS LIGHTS IN THE WORLD.

"But the voice cried once, 'My Brother,
You devoted soul and mind
To the welfare of your brethren,
To the service of your kind.
Now what sorrow can you comfort,
You who live in helpless pain,
With an impotent compassion
Fretting out your life in vain?'
No, and then the gentle answer
Rose more full and loud and clear,
'For the sake of all my brethren
I thank God that I am here.
Poor has been my life's best effort ;
Now I waste no thought or breath,
For the prayer of those who suffer
Has the strength of love and death.'"

CHRISTIANS are intended to shine. The world is dark, and they are heaven's lamps set to lighten the darkness. The figure is a very striking one. "Ye are the light of the world." Christ was careful to teach, too, that the lamp must be placed where it will shine,

—on a lampstand, and not covered up or hidden.

When it began to grow dark in the evening, the housekeeper lighted her rude lamp. It did not shine of itself; it had to be lighted first. We are only unlighted candles until Christ lights us. There is no shining light in us in our natural, unspiritual state. Christ himself is the Light of the world,—the one self-burning, original light. “He is the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” He is the brightness of the Father’s glory. In him the full blessed light of God’s own life and love shone over the earth. For a time he was in the world, and the brightness streamed far abroad. Then, before he went away, he lighted a cluster of lamps, and left them burning. “Now ye are the light of the world,” he said to his disciples.

We begin to be light only when Christ’s life touches ours, when his light kindles ours. “Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.” A house may have in it all the wires

and globes for electric lighting, everything in perfect order; but if there is no connection with the electro dynamo, there is no light. Let the connection be made, and the house is full of light. We have in us the capacity for shining, — “the spirit of man is the candle of the Lord,” — but there is no burning until the flame of God has lighted us. Even the apostles were only a cluster of unlighted candles until, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit touched them. Then they began at once to shine as bright lights.

We may notice also that it is light we are to give out — not noise, not display, not good works only, though there will always be good works, not mere professions of religion, but light, something that will shine out and reveal itself by its brightness, that will make at least one spot of the world a little brighter. Truth is light. Holiness is light. All the fruits of the Spirit are light, — love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, faith.

We are in danger of thinking that the most characteristic thing about a Christian life is its

activities, its public confessions, its charities, the things it does. But light rays out noiselessly. Who ever hears it? Who ever sees it? Silently and invisibly it does its wonderful work. Its mission is not to call attention to itself, but to reveal beauty in everything that is beautiful. When the sun rises on a summer's morning, earth's loveliness in plant, flower, grass, and waving harvest, and in mountain, hill, waterfall, — in all nature, — is revealed. The light in a Christian life should make all the world a little more beautiful. It brightens the commonest things. The dreariest places are made lovely by it. Poverty, care and sorrow are transfigured by a victorious faith.

The best part of a Christian life is not in what it does, but in what it is — the quiet light that shines out in the character; not the act, but the spirit that is in the act; not the service rendered, but the love that is in the service and inspires it; not the work that is done, but the motive that makes the work sacred. Ofttimes there is a holier, softer, whiter light that streams out in the joyous submission of

the believer, in loss, sorrow, or pain, than ever there was in his life in the days of greatest activity, when large things were achieved, when hard battles were fought. Light is life's truest and best expression.

There is something else that the figure of light suggests, — there must be burning before there can be shining. Scientific men tell us that the light which streams from the sun, which warms the earth, woos out the flowers, ripens the harvests, makes and reveals beauty, and spreads cheer everywhere, is produced by a burning up of the sun's substance. The same is true of all light, — it is at the cost of self-consuming that it shines out. The soft light of the evening lamp which fills the room comes from the wasting of the oil.

It is just as true in Christian life that burning must come before shining. We cannot be of great use to others without real cost to ourselves. Burning suggests suffering. We shrink from pain; we do not set it down among the pleasant things of our life. We are apt to feel that we are doing the greatest good

in the world when we are strong and able for active duty, and when heart and hands are full of kindly services. When we are called aside and can only suffer, when we are sick, when we are consumed with pain, when all our activities have been dropped out of our hands, we feel that we are no longer of use, that we are not doing anything. But if we are patient and submissive, it is almost certain that we are a greater blessing to the world in our time of suffering and pain than we were in the days when we thought we were doing the most by our work. We are burning now, and shining because we are burning. But little light rayed out from us in the days of ease and comfort. Now, however, when we are being consumed by sorrow, or are wasting in sickness, or are giving out the best of our life and its substance in self-denying service, there is pouring out from us a quiet and holy light which is an incalculable blessing to the world.

Christ himself was a sufferer. He was utterly unselfish. He never saved himself. In

his life love was ever giving. He was never too tired to answer any call that came to his ear for help. "Virtue went out of him" to heal; he did not heal easily, without cost to himself. We sometimes say it is very easy to be kind and gentle. No, it is never easy. Every ray of light that streams from the lamp costs the burning up of a drop of oil. Every gentle thing that Jesus ever did was at the cost of some part of his own being.

Then, at the close of that life of lowly ministry, burning and shining, there was Christ's great final, all-inclusive giving of himself on the cross for our redemption. Never before or since has the world seen such an utter consuming of a life on any altar of love as when Jesus hung in the darkness, and suffered and died. But we know, too, what wondrous light streamed from that cross. It has reached all the ends of the earth. It shines in millions of homes and hearts. It is the glory of heaven — "the Lamb is the light thereof." Christ never could have blessed the world by merely living a quiet, easy, respect-

able, and prosperous life, as he did by giving himself in sacrifice of love. He is the Light of the world, because his life was consumed in love's flame.

The same principle rules in all life, — we must burn before we can shine. Jesus testified of the Baptist, "He was a burning and shining light." John's life was a splendid illustration of the truth. First, we find him burning and shining in the wilderness. After a brief time of popularity he began to be overshadowed by his Master. Jesus grew in favor, and John's popularity waned. Does any one imagine that it was easy for John to decrease while Jesus increased? Yet he never chafed or repined. Quietly and gladly he allowed his earthly glory to be consumed, to burn up, while he poured out the gentle light of praise and honor for his Lord.

By and by he was cast into prison for his heroic faithfulness, and lay there, apparently forgotten even by him whose way he had prepared, but still without repining. At last he was beheaded to gratify the revenge of a

wicked woman—his noble life thus tragically ended in its very prime. “Wasted,” his disciples must have thought, as they buried the headless body—utterly consumed. Yes; but consumed only as the oil of the lamp is consumed, meanwhile sending out soft, mellow light to fill the room. John was a burning and a shining light. The light from his life is shining to-day wherever the gospel goes. The world is brighter and better because he lived so nobly, so unselfishly, witnessed so faithfully, and then died so heroically.

There is a lesson here for all, and also comfort for many. The lesson is that we must burn to shine. We may not all have to burn as Jesus did, giving our very life in sacrifice, or as John did, with such utter self-effacement; but the law must be the same in all,—there can be no shining without some measure of burning. The oil must waste if there is to be light. He who is not ready for the giving up of his life, for self-denial and sacrifice, is not ready to be a lamp of Christ, giving light in this world.

“How much we take, how little give!
Yet every life is meant
To help all lives; each man should live
For all men's betterment.”

The comfort is for those who find themselves in positions where they must give their life to be burned, consumed, in duty, in serving others, or in suffering. It may be that in just these experiences they are giving to the world greater blessing than ever they gave it in the days which seemed so much happier.

We need to watch, however, that we really shine when we are burning. Some persons chafe, fret, and repine; some even grow rebellious in suffering. They do not suffer gladly; they do not make sacrifices cheerfully. These do not shine, or at least the light they give out is dim and stained. We shine only when we acquiesce in the will of God, even in suffering and loss; when we rejoice and sing even in pain; when we serve in love, without regret or complaining. Peace is light; joy is light. We must learn to suffer patiently, without complaining; then we shall shine while we burn.

Wherever we are set in this world we are to be a light. We must be sure that our candle is really lighted by the torch of the Holy Spirit. Then we must be sure that our lamp is not hidden under a bushel or under a bed, but that it is on the lampstand, so that its light may shine out to fill all the house.

“My life is not my own, but Christ’s, who gave it,
And he bestows it upon all the race ;
I lose it for his sake, and thus I save it ;
I hold it close, but only to expend it ;
Accept it, Lord, for others, through thy grace.”

CHAPTER XII.

THE CRITICAL HABIT.

Lord, make us love all; that when we meet,
Even myriads of earth's myriads at thy bar,
We may be glad, as all true lovers are,
Who, having parted, count reunion sweet,
Safe gathered home around thy blessed feet,
Come home by different roads from near or far,
Whether by whirlwind or by flaming car,
From pangs or sleep, safe folded round thy seat.

CHRISTINA G. ROSSETTI.

ST. PAUL, in one of his terse, strong sentences, tells us that "knowledge puffeth up, but love buildeth up." Mere knowledge inflates a man, makes him vain, self-conceited. In relation to others it makes him arrogant, critical, impatient, censorious, intolerant. Thus knowledge alone is insufficient as a qualification for dealing with others. There must be love as well as knowledge. Love in the heart tempers knowledge. It makes us patient with

others, charitable toward their mistakes, quick to see the good that is in them, ready to bear with their infirmities, and to help them to do better.

At no other point is this teaching more important than in our judging of others. The habit of finding fault is altogether too common. It is easy; any one can find fault. We see blemishes and flaws, and we like to speak about them. It seems a luxury to some people to do so. The law of love, however, if given full sway, would put restraint upon us, not only upon the utterance of our criticisms, but also upon all unkindly judgment of others and of their acts. Love suffereth long, and is kind. Love taketh not account of evil.

We should think of the effect of criticism on others. It discourages and oftentimes does serious hurt. Life is not easy for any one, and to many people it is very hard. They are carrying every ounce of burden they can possibly carry. They sometimes almost totter beneath their heavy load. Now suppose that, instead of saying cheering words to these people,

heartening words which would put new hope and courage into their spirit, we do nothing but criticise them, find fault with them, speak in a harsh, unloving way of them; what is the effect upon them? It can only be hurtful. It makes their load all the heavier. Or, rather, it takes out of their heart the enthusiasm, the hope, the courage, and makes it harder for them to go on.

At certain points in the Alps, tourists are cautioned by the guides not to speak or sing, or even to whisper, as the faintest breath might start reverberations in the air which would loosen a delicately poised avalanche from its place on the mountain, and bring it crashing down upon villages and fields. There are men and women who are walking under such stress of burden, care, responsibility, sorrow, or temptation, that one whisper of censure, of criticism, of complaint, of unkindness, may cause them to fall under their load. It is a crime thus to imperil another life. On the other hand, we should be the friend and helper of every human soul in its struggle after bet-

ter things. The world needs love, love that will never add to another's burden, that will not judge or condemn another, but that will always give cheer, encouragement, and inspiration of hope. Knowledge that puffs up and makes one censorious is not of God. Without love we are not fit to touch another life. Love builds up.

This lesson is not unneeded. We may as well confess that we are all prone to be critical of our fellows. We fall most easily into the habit of saying unkindly things of others. We do not mean to hurt any one. We disclaim all intention to be unfair or unkind. We imagine that our criticisms are just and right, and therefore that we should utter them. We forget that we ought to look at others through eyes of love, and not through eyes of mere cold knowledge. We do not know how much harm we do by our unchristian censure and faultfinding.

Especially should we think of the influence of this critical habit on Christian workers, our companions and friends. It is not our

work that they are doing. They are not in our employ. We are not their masters. They are not under our direction. We have no right whatever to dictate to them how they shall do the work of Christ, or to criticise the way in which they do it. Christ is their Master. It is his work that they are doing. They should do it under his direction. To him as their Master they stand or fall. We can have no possible right to criticise them, or find fault with them.

In some churches there is too much of the faultfinding spirit. It is not the true Christ-spirit. When retiring and timid Christians know that everything they do is watched for the purpose, not of kindly commendation, but of criticism, and when they hear of unfriendly things said about their work, it is not hard to foretell the consequences. There are certain matters in which liberty of adverse opinion may be allowed, and where no one can be blamed for expressing his judgment. There may be no special harm in criticising a woman's dress, or bonnet, or gait, or the house which a

man builds, or his careless way of doing business, or the singing of one who sings as a professional, although possibly even this sort of censure cannot be vindicated on strict Christian principles. But certainly we have no right to sit as judge on our fellow Christians' efforts to do Christ's work. It may be that we know better ways of working, and could teach them much. But we should never assume to be their censors, their judges, their critics, talking of the sacred things of Christ as if they were only pieces of common week-day work.

We all remember how Jesus dealt with his disciples in their poor, faulty work. He commended what they did. "She hath done what she could," was his gentle defence of one who had done a deed of love which older disciples were condemning and criticising. So it ever was. He never found fault with his disciples when they were doing their best.

Some one has said that many of the most beautiful things in heaven are earth's blunders, — things God's children, with loving heart,

tried to do to please God. The blunders tell of love, and are dear to God. There is a rich home in which the most sacred and precious household treasure is a puckered seam. A little child one day picked up the mother's sewing,—some simple thing she had been working on and had laid down,—and after half an hour's quiet brought it, and gave it to her, saying, "Mamma, I's been helping you, 'cause I love you so." The stitches were long, and the sewing was all puckered; but the mother saw only beauty in it all, for it told of her child's love and eagerness to please her. That night the little one sickened, and in a few hours was dead. No wonder the mother keeps that piece of drawn and puckered sewing among her rarest treasures. Nothing that the most skilful hands have wrought, among all her household possessions, means to her half so much as that handkerchief with the child's unskilful work on it.

May not this be the way in which God looks at his children's homeliest and humblest efforts to do things for him? We know well how

faulty even the best Christian work done in this world must seem to Christ, — how full of un wisdom, how foolish, much of it, how mixed with self and vanity, how untactful, how indiscreet, how without prayer and love, how ignorant, how ungentle. Of course we can see many faults in the work of others; but we should remember always how poor, mistaken, unworthy, how imperfectly done, is even our best service, as it looks to Christ's pure and holy eyes. We should remember, too, that he does not chide us for it, does not blame us for doing so ill the sacred things he gave us to do, does not talk complainingly to the angels and the apostles about our mistakes. Oh, no! many of our poor blunders, our most faulty pieces of work, are held as among our Master's most sacred treasures in heaven. He uses our blundering efforts, if only love and faith be in them, to bless others, to do good, to build up his kingdom. He is saving the world to-day, not through faultless work of angels, but through the poor, ignorant, flawed, oftentimes foolish, work of disciples who love him and

want to help him. He puts the treasures of grace for the world into earthen vessels.

Can we not learn this great lesson from our Master? "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." Somehow the habit so grows upon us that we come to feel after a while as if we had a right to find fault, we have grown so wise. "Knowledge puffs up." We think ourselves quite competent to criticise any Christian worker, old or young, layman or minister. "Knowledge puffs up." Yes; but it is not Christian, it is not like Christ. He did not do it, and why should we? If he is pleased to use people's poor, blundering work, have we any right to find fault with it?

We should remember, too, that no most faulty work that any one may do hurts Christ's heart half so much as when we grow censorious and critical. That is a kind of work which never pleases him, which he never commends. It is never beautiful in his eyes.

"Love builds up." Shall we not learn to look on all other Christians and their work as Christ looks upon us and our work, — with pa-

tience and love? Shall we not restrain our lips from every faultfinding word that we are tempted to speak when we see flaws or mistakes? Of course we can criticise finely, but that is not a high Christian attainment, a fruit of the Spirit, an art in which proficiency is honorable. Criticism is not our mission.

Two things we are set here to do : we should do our own work as well as we can ; then we should give cheer, inspiration, and encouragement to every other worker for Christ who comes within our influence. How much more angelic is this than to censure and blame and find fault with others? Words of encouragement spoken to those who are striving to be of use and to live well are holy words. They please the Master, and they inspire in those to whom they are spoken the hope that is the forerunner of success.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE OTHER SIDE.

“If thou art blest,
Then let the sunshine of thy gladness rest
On the dark edges of each cloud that lies
Black in thy brother's skies.
If thou art sad,
Still be thou in thy brother's gladness glad.”

THERE are two sides of life's road, — the side on which are lying the wounded, the suffering, the needy, the despoiled, the dying; and the “other side.” The other side is a well-trodden side. It is the easier side to go on. There is nothing to interrupt you. You do not need to lose time in stopping to help people who are sick, weak, fainting, wounded, or in any want or trouble. You will get along faster on this other side. You will save yourself a great deal of inconvenience and annoyance, and much uncomfortable feeling.

It is very trying to a man or a woman with tender sensibilities to see suffering, or to look upon one who has been injured. Some good people cannot stand it at all,—they faint when they see blood. It is hard to do anything for unfortunate people; it pains one's kindly heart even to look at them in their distress.

So we see that the side where the suffering, the poor, the troubled, the needy, the fallen, lie, is not the easy side. It has in it much that is painful to a tender heart. It hinders one, too, in one's journey, if one stops to do anything for the relief of these hurt ones. Then it costs, for it takes both effort and money to give any kind of effective help.

The other side has nothing on it to pain one's sensibilities. It is said that when Marie Antoinette was riding to Notre Dame for her bridal the command was given to keep from the wayside all beggars, cripples, and ragged people, that there might be nothing in all the course to pain the gentle-hearted woman. That is the way the other side is kept. You can go that way, and nothing will distress

you. There will be no appeals to your sympathy which you will be inclined to heed, no calls for your help, no hands reached out for kindness and charity. You will get along quickly; for there will be no interruptions, no loss of time in relieving any one.

The other side would seem the better side for us to take. Yes, if comfort, and speed, and the saving of our money, and earthly ease and success, be life's real ends. But do you know where the other side goes to? If you will turn to the twenty-fifth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, you will see the farther end of this delightfully easy road. "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels."

That is where the other side comes out in the eternal world; for the Judge says of these people, "I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in

prison, and ye visited me not." They had not hurt any one, — these people on the left hand. They were not robbers. They had not wounded any one. They had tempted no one. They were good people, who had not harmed even a dog or a worm. They had only not turned aside to relieve the suffering. They had only passed by on the other side. Yet, when the veil is lifted, it seems that the other side leads to the place "prepared for the devil and his angels."

We should not overlook the fact that the two men who passed by on the other side in our Lord's parable were regarded as religious men of the best type in those days. They were rated as good men, — typically good. They professed to stand for God. They prayed for the people, and offered sacrifices for them. They were thought to have compassionate hearts, able to sympathize. Yet, when they were brought face to face with great and urgent human needs, they passed by on the other side.

This is our Lord's own picture, and there-

fore is not in any way exaggerated. The religion of our Lord's day was weighed and found wanting. Faith without works is dead. A true creed truly believed is life in a soul. Its essence is love, — not love to God only, for the apostle of love tells us that he who loves God will love his neighbor also. The religion of Christ never takes a man on the other side ; it takes him right among human needs.

We have this fact illustrated in this same story. The priest and the Levite came, and brought no relief. Then God sent another man. This man differs from the other two. We cannot expect much of him ; for he is half heathen, — he is a Samaritan. He will not do anything for this wounded Jew. But see ! he is stopping. He gets off his beast, and goes over to the dying man. He speaks to him. Now he is down on his knees in the dust, trying to help him. He laves his wounds, and pours in wine and oil. Then he lifts him upon his own beast, and supports him, bearing him to the wayside inn. There he personally cares for him overnight, and when

he leaves in the morning he makes provision for the man's care until he has recovered from his wounds.

This Samaritan did not take the other side. He took the side of the suffering and needy. It cost him much. He lost time, and to a business man time is money. He put himself in danger from the robbers. He got his clothes soiled, — dusty and bloody. It was hard work for him to get the wounded man to the inn. Then it was an enemy he was helping, a man who despised him; and he had to overcome his natural aversion in showing him such kindness.

The other side would have been easier. It is always easier, less costly. People seem to get along better not to worry with benevolence and charity, not to try to be kind to the unfortunate, not to trouble themselves with attempts to rescue the imperilled, lift up the fallen, or save the heathen. Good Christian people who are active in city mission work could find much pleasanter ways of spending their time than in visiting the slums, and in

working among the degraded, trying to do them good. The Christ-side is not the easy side to go on. Jesus himself did not find it easy—we know where it took him.

But we know where this side comes out in the eternal world. "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me." They had taken the side where the unfortunate were, and hands and heart had joined in service.

There is a story of a company of eager runners in a race. At the very beginning there was one who led the others. There seemed no question that he would win. Presently, however, a case of distress lay in his course; and he stopped and gave relief. Again he was on his way, and well in advance, when a child's

cry arrested him, and he turned aside to give comfort. Thus continually, as he went on, he was interrupted by need, sorrow, and distress; and to every appeal he gave instant and loving heed, leaving his chosen path to aid and to help. At last, when the race was over, he had been far outstripped by those who were less strong and swift than himself, but who had paid no regard to any cries of need on the way. These chose the other side, and reached the earthly goal, and were crowned; while he, all unknown, unheeded, unhonored, stood there wearing no earthly crown, yet the real winner of the race.

This tells the story of thousands of what are called failures among men. Those who might have won highest honors turned aside from their ambitions to do God's work on the way. They stopped to give comfort, to lift up the fallen, to help the weak. In the race with the other men they lost, but in God's sight they are the real winners. The other side is the world's side; but it is not Christ's side, nor the side of those who truly follow him.

“ We go our ways in life too much alone ,
We hold ourselves too far from all our kind ;
Too often we are dead to sigh and moan,
Too often to the weak and helpless blind ;
Too often where distress and want abide
We turn, and pass upon the other side.

The other side is trodden smooth, and worn
By footprints passing idly all the day ;
Where lie the bruised ones that faint and mourn
Is seldom more than an untrodden way.
Our selfish hearts are for our feet the guide ;
They lead us by upon the other side.

It should be ours the oil and wine to pour
Into the bleeding wounds of stricken ones ;
To take the smitten and the sick and sore,
And bear them where a stream of blessing runs.
Instead, we look about ; the way is wide,
And so we pass upon the other side.

O friends and brothers, gliding down the years,
Humanity is calling each and all
In tender accents, born of grief and tears.
I pray you, listen to the thrilling call ;
You cannot, in your cold and selfish pride,
Pass guiltlessly by on the other side.”

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HOPEFULNESS OF JESUS.

We are weary, and are
Feeble and faint in our march,
Ready to drop down and die;
Still thou tarriedst, and still
Gavest the weary thine hand.
If in the ways of the world
Stones have wounded thy feet,
Toil or dejection have tried
Thy spirit, of that we saw
Nothing; to us thou wert still
Cheerful and healthful and firm.

M. ARNOLD.

It is cheering to know that our Leader never faltered, never lost heart, for one moment. The story of Jesus, from the moment of his birth until the day when he was taken up, is one of magnificent hopefulness. There was an old prophecy concerning him which said, "He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth." And he never was discouraged. Life was not easy for him;

it was always hard ; but hope never languished in his heart.

His beginning was lowly and feeble in human eyes. He was born of a peasant mother. Though angels sang of his coming into the world, the shepherds found the wonderful Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. His early years were spent in poverty. He learned a trade—he whose hand had made the heavens wrought at a common carpenter's bench. Yet the lowliness of his circumstances did not embitter his spirit. He never complained that his earthly life was not in keeping with the glory of his person or the dignity of his mission. He never said that he could make nothing of his life because of the narrowness and unmeetness of his environment. Indeed, out of his very poverty and toil, and out of the very limitations of his condition, came some of the finest things in his character.

It is never in ease or luxury, with freedom from sense of need and care, that the world's best and strongest helpers are trained. Those

who have grown up in the midst of common human conditions, knowing care and the pressure of life's burdens, feeling the stress of need and the pinch of narrow limitations, meeting trial and enduring struggle, learn in these very experiences to be sympathetic and helpful to others.

Nor did the hopefulness of Jesus fail him in the days of his poverty and trial, or in the midst of his straitened circumstances. He lived a life of sweet content, and learned the lessons that were set for him. He never lost his joy. One secret was that he was ever doing his Father's will; and this gave him gladness, even in the hour of bitterest pain. Another secret was his confidence in the final outcome of the work he was doing at such tremendous cost. He knew his mission could not fail.

The danger of narrow circumstances is that the heart may lose its sweetness and grow bitter. But Jesus went through his years of poverty, want, hardship, and toil with small earnings, and all the petty annoyances and

frets of Galilean peasant life, with heart as quiet, peaceful, and loving as if he had been living yet in heaven. He was never fretted or worried. He was never afraid to see the last farthing go, or the last loaf eaten. He lived himself his own lesson against anxiety before he gave it to his disciples.

Few men have ever wrought in this world whose lives seemed more utter failures at the end than did the life of Jesus. There seemed no room for him in this world. He found no welcome when he first came. During the wonderful years of his public ministry, though crowds followed him, he was not loved, save by a very few. Most of those who followed him, followed him only for his miracles, through curiosity, or for the help they might get from him. At the last all men forsook him. Then all ended on a cross.

Yet in this long experience of unwelcome, rejection, and ingratitude, he was never discouraged. He foresaw the end, but he came toward the dark tragedy like a conqueror. Hope shone in his face, and burned in his

words, like a flame of glory. In the same sentence in which he said he must be killed, he said also that he would be raised again the third day. Instead of speaking of his work as a failure, he spoke of the kingdom he was to establish as one that would fill the world. He went on making plans for the future, beyond his death, as if death would be only an incident in his great mission. The cross had no dismay for him, because he had a prevision of what lay beyond it. He talked of his kingdom, even on his trial.

What was the secret of this sublime hopefulness of Jesus? He knew that his work was only beginning. He was a sower, not a reaper. Ages to come would witness the harvest from his life, his teachings, his tears, his blood. He would rise again, and his name and glory and his saving health would fill all the earth. He would see of the travail of his soul, and would be satisfied.

We have another illustration of the hopefulness of Jesus in his dealing with men. He saw men as sinners, but as sinners who could

be saved. In even the veriest wreck of humanity that crept to his feet he beheld the ruin of a child of his Father, but in no case a hopeless ruin. He perceived in every soiled soul the possibilities of restoration to the image divine. He was in the world as a physician, and had all wisdom and all skill. He knew just what was wrong in each life, and knew also how to cure the disease, how to restore the soul to beauty.

“ He took the suffering human race,
He read each wound, each weakness, clear,
And struck his finger on the place,
And said, ‘ Thou ailest here, and here.’ ”

There were no hopeless cases to his eye, no lives which could not be made whole. Those whom the Pharisees regarded as lost, he saw as straying, wandering sheep; and he was the Good Shepherd who had come to seek them, and bear them back to the fold. In every human soul he found something that was worth saving—he saw the gold of divine life gleaming amid the moral and spiritual *débris*. Men whom other teachers would

have regarded as hopeless, he took, and lifted them up to noble, beautiful life. He took Simon, a rough, swearing fisherman, and, discerning the man in him under all the roughness, called him Peter, a rock, and by wise discipline trained him into majestic strength of manly character and apostolic power. He found Matthew, a publican, an outcast, and seeing the nobility of nature in him beneath his soiled name and reputation, called him to be an apostle, and the writer of the first Gospel. He saw Zaccheus, another outcast, and, looking into his soul, perceived the gleaming gold of Abrahamic virtue shining amid the ruin, and called him to sainthood. One day a woman crept to his feet, and began to wash them with her hot tears. The Pharisee in whose house Jesus was eating knew her to be an abandoned woman, and regarded her unfit for any respectable man to touch. But Jesus saw amid the wrecks of life a soul, and saved her. So he went about continually, perceiving in every life on which his eyes fell material for immortal temple-building.

We see this same marvellous hopefulness in the patience of Jesus toward his disciples. The work of training them would certainly have been discouraging to any other teacher. How could he ever make apostles of such men? They lacked the elements which seemed essential in the men who were to found a heavenly kingdom in this world. The old evil was forever breaking out in them, marring his work on their lives. But he was never discouraged. He had unfailing faith and infinite patience. At last his faith and patience were justified and rewarded, for after his ascension his apostles went out and filled the world with the story of his mission.

In this unconquerable hopefulness of Jesus there ought to be rich inspiration for all his friends. He never doubted the final triumph of his kingdom, and shall we doubt it? Men are talking pessimistically these days about Christianity, but that was not the spirit which was in the heart of the Master. We should never be discouraged. Old forms may fall away, the old order may change, organizations

may grow effete, and lose their efficiency; but the spirit of Christ is unconquerable, and the life of Christ in the world never can fail.

From Christ's optimism, too, we should get new hope for men. We need more of our Master's enthusiasm for humanity. No degradation should be regarded as hopeless. From the veriest ruin of a life we should not despair of seeing holy sainthood rising.

Then we should seek to have Christ's hopefulness in hard conditions and circumstances. We are too easily cast down by trial. We allow ourselves to be weakened by discouragement. We are too easily dismayed. Our Master would have us unaffected by life's changes, undaunted by earthly losses, with a hope that never fails, and a faith that never wavers.

“Through storm and sun the age draws on
When heaven and earth shall meet,
For the Lord has said that glorious
He will make the place of his feet.
And the grass may die on the summer hills,
The flower fade by the river,
But our God is the same through endless years,
And his word shall stand forever,

‘What of the night, O watchman
Set to mark the dawn of day?’
‘The wind blows fair from the morning star,
And the shadows flee away.
Dark are the vales, but the mountains glow
As the light its splendor flings,
And the Sun of Righteousness comes up
With healing in his wings.’

Shine on, shine on, O blessed Sun,
Through all the round of heaven,
Till the darkest vale and the farthest isle
Full to thy light are given.
Till the desert and the wilderness
As Sharon’s plain shall be,
And the love of the Lord shall fill the earth
As the waters fill the sea.”

CHAPTER XV.

THE VALUE OF THE RESERVE.

Nor deem the irrevocable past
As wholly wasted, wholly vain,
If, rising on its wrecks, at last
To something nobler we attain.

LONGFELLOW.

LIFE is full of crises. They lie hidden along the way, and we come upon them suddenly and unexpectedly. We have no time then to make adequate and fitting preparation for meeting them; and if we have no reserve from which to draw for these emergencies, which require so much more than ordinary resources, we shall fail in them.

This principle has illustration in all departments of life. A man who carries no reserve of physical vitality is likely to succumb to a slight illness, while one with stores of health in his constitution passes safely through a

much severer sickness. The annals of war afford many examples of the same law. A commander who has all his forces in action, and has no reserve to bring upon the field to turn the scale when a crisis comes and the battle trembles in the balance, loses the day. On the other hand, the commander who has a reserve force to call up at the critical moment, when decision is wavering, wins the field.

In moral and spiritual life it is the same. It is the reserve power that counts for most in all final tests. It is the man who is ready for emergencies that succeeds. It is not enough to be barely prepared for ordinary events. The ship that is built only for calm days and quiet seas glides on safely enough while the sky is blue and the waters are smooth ; but what will it do in the storms and tempests which are sure to come? The life that is prepared only for easy experiences, for happy days, for friendly influences and favoring circumstances, gets on well enough while its way runs along amid gardens and fountains, where all is beauty and ease ; but what will it do

when the path bends suddenly into a dark chasm of sorrow, or into the midst of fierce enmities and antagonisms? If it has no reserve strength in readiness for such a time of stress and need, it can only sink down in defeat. A ship to be prepared for safe passage over tempest-swept seas must have built into its keel power to resist the angriest storm that may strike it. It is not sufficient that it be strong enough merely to glide along in smooth waters. A life to be assuredly victorious in every possible emergency must be ready not only for the quiet days of happiness and joy, but must be prepared with stores of reserve strength for any possible trial or conflict that may arise in the future.

No career is a dead level from cradle to grave. The days are not all bright, the course is not all smooth, the experiences are not all pleasant and agreeable. We all come to steep pinches, where ordinary strength is not adequate. We pass into gloomy places, in which we shall be left in darkness if we have no night-lamps by us. We must all be assailed

by temptations and by spiritual foes, when victory can be gained only if we have reserves of strength for resistance to call into action. We must stand before tasks which will altogether baffle our ability, if we have been working up to our best in the common duties of the common days, and have capacity in us for nothing better. "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?"

It is not enough, however, to forecast trials and emergencies; we must consider how we may provide against them, how we may meet them without being overmastered by them. The shipbuilder calculates the force of wind and wave, and puts into his vessel, which he builds in the quiet sunshine, strength enough to withstand the wildest fury of the ocean. He does this by storing iron, steel, and wood in the keel until it is staunch and strong, and ready to outride any gale.

It is easy enough to do this in the building of a ship. But how can we store in our character the reserve that shall enable us to meet the stern emergencies of life, and be victorious in them? Our Lord's parable of the lamps and the oil helps us to an answer. The foolish virgins were left in darkness at the moment of need because they had but their little lampful of oil — enough to burn only an hour, with no vessel of oil in reserve from which to refill the little cup. We must have something besides human nature, even at its best, if we would be ready for all that lies before us. We must get our little lives attached to God's great life in such a way that we can draw from his fulness in every time of need. Our own lamps will burn only for an hour, and if we have but our own heartful of life we shall be left in darkness at the midnight hour. But if we have the divine Spirit to renew our exhausted strength at the moment of need, the light will never go out, even in the darkest and longest of earth's nights.

There are special ways, also, in which we can build into our character the reserve needed for life's crises. One way is, by the constant reading and pondering of God's word. One who knows the Scriptures, who has the sacred words hidden in his heart, is ready for trial and temptation. It may not seem worth while to store away in heart and memory the words of God for trouble and danger, when there is neither trouble nor danger impending; but there is no other way of providing for these experiences.

A train was sweeping along in the bright sunshine, when an attendant passed through the cars and lighted the lamps. The passengers wondered why this should be done at midday; but while they were talking about it, asking what it meant, the train plunged into a long, dark tunnel. Then all understood why the lamps had been lighted back there in the sunshine. This providing of light in advance prepared for the gloom in the tunnel's deep night. This illustrates what God's words stored in the heart do for us when

our path suddenly bends into the darkness of sorrow. He who in the sunny days has not made the divine promises his own, when trouble comes has no comforts to sustain him. But he who has pondered the holy word, and laid up in memory its precious truths and assurances, when called to pass through affliction has light in his dwelling.

It is the same in temptation. Our Lord, when he was tempted, repelled Satan's assaults with sword-words of Scripture. "It is written," was his answer in each temptation. But he did not there and then have to take out his Bible, and look up the texts he wanted, and read them to the tempter. He had them in his memory; he had hidden the holy words in his heart in the quiet days at Nazareth, and now had only to recall them at his hour of need.

We must all meet temptation; and usually it comes suddenly, so that if we cannot instantly repel it, we shall be foiled. There is nothing like texts of Scripture to drive away the tempter; and if we have our quiver full of

these piercing darts, ready to draw out on a moment's notice to hurl at our enemy, we need never fail. To have such reserve ready for the crises of sorrow and temptation, we need to begin in our earliest days to store away in heart and memory the words of God.

Another way of preparing reserve for life's emergencies is by prayer. Those who daily commune with God, breathe his life into their soul, become strong with that secret, hidden strength which preserves them from falling in the days of trial. Prayer gathers God's own strength into the soul, and builds divinity itself into the character.

Then, holy habits of living also store away reserves of strength which make one secure from the pressure of life's trials. One whose daily life is careless, is always weak; but one who habitually serves God and walks in the paths of uprightness and obedience, grows strong in the fountains of his being. Exercise develops all the powers of life. Self-discipline knits thews like iron cords. Doing good continually adds to one's capacity for

doing good. Victory in temptation puts new fibre into the victor's arm. Thus he who forms habits of well-doing is continually piling away in his soul reserves of strength by which he will be ready to meet the sudden shocks of danger or trial, or the unexpected demands of duty.

From all this we learn the importance of beginning in childhood and youth to prepare for the life that is to be victorious and noble. Wasted early years leave life depleted of its power for resisting evil, and for accomplishing anything worthy in the days of its prime. Early years, lived near to God, fed upon God's word, nourished by prayer, and passed in holy living, make a life ready for any emergency, and for victory in any conflict. Every to-day's worthy living prepares us for a nobler to-morrow.

“Never a day is given
But it tones the after years,
And it carries up to heaven
Its sunshine or its tears ;
While the to-morrows stand and wait —
The silent mutes by the outer gate.”

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BLESSING OF A THORN.

Joy is but sorrow
While we know
It ends to-morrow;
Even so!
Joy with lifted veil
Shows a face as pale
As the fair changing moon so fair and frail.

Pain is but pleasure
If we know
It heaps up treasure;
Even so!
Turn, transfigured Pain;
Sweetheart, turn again,
For fair art thou as moonrise after rain.
CHRISTINA G. ROSSETTI.

It is an old story, but it is worth retelling many times for its rich lessons. St. Paul had some serious malady which caused him a great deal of suffering, and seemed to unfit him for duty. We need not trouble ourselves to guess what it was. He calls it a "thorn in the

flesh." He asked the Lord to remove it, but the request was not granted.

We might stop just here, and call it an unanswered prayer. But there is something else in the story which we must not overlook. It really was not an unanswered prayer. We learn that this thorn had a mission. It seems that originally it was a messenger of Satan. Just what Satan's connection with it was we are not told. Satan's intention was to buffet Christ's servant, to annoy him, to give him pain, to lessen his influence and usefulness. But this messenger of Satan is seized by Christ, and transformed into a minister of good and blessing.

That is what Christ would do with all the evils that come into our lives. He would not only prevent them from working harm to us, but he would compel them to do us good. Temptation comes to us as a messenger of Satan to entice us to sin. If we yield to it, it leaves us broken and defeated, lying in the dust of shame, our soul hurt. But if we resist it and overcome it, not only can no harm come

to us, but we have snatched a blessing from the hand of our foe. The victorious encounter has made us stronger, and the experience of temptation has enriched our life.

Sorrow also is evil in itself. Left to work out its natural effects in a life, it would dim the soul's lustre, and quench its joy. But Christ takes sorrow, and transforms it into a messenger of grace. When we get home, we shall see that we owe many of the best things in our life to the ministry of suffering.

There is not a hardness of any kind that comes into our life that may not be thus transformed into good. Difficulties are laid in our path, not for stumbling-stones, but for stepping-stones. Thwartings and hindrances are not intended to check our progress, but to put more strength into our life. Botanists tell us that the fruits on a tree are arrested growths. They would naturally develop into new twigs and branches, but the progress is checked in some way, and the growths are stunted. Yet the tree does not allow them to be failures; it turns its thwarted developments into some-

thing even better than its first hopes. So it may be with thwarted hopes and plans in human life; they may become rich fruits in the character. That is what the grace of God is ready to make of them. There is no messenger of Satan that may not be transformed into a minister of blessing.

The reason St. Paul's prayer was not directly answered and his thorn removed, was because he needed the thorn. He could not have spared it without sore loss. He would have grown proud if the torturing trouble had been taken away. No doubt there is in this fragment of spiritual biography a suggestion of the reason of many unanswered prayers. The things we beseech God to give us, and which we think would add so much to our comfort and good, would not be blessings. The thing we ask God to take away, which we think hinders us so much in our usefulness, really is something that we need. Paul had not thought of his thorn as a blessing, nor had it ever occurred to him that he could not spare it. He had thought of it only as a weighty encum-

brance, which it were well for him to get rid of as speedily as possible.

We are not accustomed either to think of our thorn as something we could not part with without loss or peril. We are not accustomed to thank God for the burdening, torturing trouble which causes so much pain. We do not dream that in any sense it is a good for which we ought to be grateful. Yet if we could see into our own inner life, no doubt we should find that it is one of our best blessings. There is a marginal Bible reading that tells us that our burden is a gift of God to us. This is very interesting. It is a new and most inspiring revelation to the Christian, when he learns for the first time that the load under which he is bowing is his Father's gift. When we remember who God is, how gracious and kind he is always, we cannot doubt that his gift must be good, whatever it is. It may be suffering, it may be a heavy cross of care, it may be a bodily defect or infirmity. It may be a burden that we are carrying from love, the burden of some other one's broken life. It may be a

burden of sickness, of pain, of loss, of sorrow. Whatever it is, our burden is God's gift.

When we think of it in this way, how the heaviest burden is changed before us! That which an hour ago seemed so oppressive in its weight, so unlovely in its form and features, is hallowed and transformed. We had thought it an evil; but now it appears as another of God's blessings, its mission being to advance our good. Far more than most of us are aware are we indebted to our burden, our thorn, for many of the best things in our life. It is that by which we have grown into our greatest measures of strength.

No wonder, then, that, when we cry to God for the taking away of what seem to us hindrances, but really are helps, he does not heed our requests. He is better to us than our own desires. To answer as we wish would be to rob us of blessings we could not afford to lose.

But there is more of the lesson. While God did not grant St. Paul's prayer for the removal of his thorn, he gave him a better

answer than he sought. It is no part of God's plan for us to make our life easy. That is what human love usually seeks to do. We think we must save our friends from every hardship, if it is possible for us to do so. If they are in trouble or distress, we would instantly deliver them if we could. Our kindness directs its efforts toward the amelioration of all suffering. We hasten to take away the burden that presses on our friend. We think love requires this.

But that is not God's way. To his loving thought there is something better than delivering us from pain; the peaceable fruits of sanctified pain are better. There is something that he desires for us more than the easing of our life by the lifting away of our burden; it is that we should grow strong under our burden, grow strong through bearing it. Hence the promise is not that God will lift off the burden that we cast upon him, but that he will sustain us in carrying it.

That is precisely what the Lord did in the case of St. Paul. The burden was not taken

away,—it was not best that it should be; that was not the truest way to give help. St. Paul needed the thorn to save him from being exalted overmuch, to keep him conscious of his earthliness. Yet the prayer did not go unanswered. Instead of the removal of the trouble came the promise, “My grace is sufficient for thee : for my strength is made perfect in weakness.”

Few things are more discouraging than weakness. It is humiliating, disheartening. It stands in the way of our doing what we are eager to do. It hampers us in our running the race of life, compelling us to fall behind our competitors. It prevents us doing the things we want to do. It seems to paralyze us when we think of carrying it about with us day after day, year after year. We think of weakness as an unrelieved misfortune. But here is a wonderful secret; weakness, if given to Christ, is filled by him with his own strength, and thus becomes mighty, invincible.

The blessing of a thorn is the blessing of weakness. We have more of Christ because

of our infirmity. Weakness is dear and endearing to the heart of Christ, and thus draws to itself more of his help than strength does. Weakness without Christ is pitiable indeed ; but weakness with Christ is unconquerable, for it receives for itself the divine strength.

These are hints of the blessing that may be in a thorn. It may become a blossoming tree, bearing fruit for our hunger and the world's, instead of a sharp thorn, piercing our flesh, and wounding and hurting us. Jesus himself wore a crown of thorns, and since then his grace can change human pain into blessing.

To get the blessing from our thorn we need only to be in Christ, dwelling close to him, intrusting all our life to him. We cannot ourselves extract good from evil, or compel our troubles to yield benedictions, or change sharp thorns into beauteous roses. No hand but Christ's can work these marvellous transformations for us. But if, with simple faith and unquestioning confidence, we lay all the hard things into the hands that bear the print of the

nails, we shall be comforted, and shall get good out of all that seems evil. One writes:—

If I might kneel
Where Jesus' smile could courage give;
If I sometimes might feel
His hand in comfort on my head,
And hear him say: "My little child,
I know it all; I still will heal
Each wound; be of good cheer."
If I close to his side might stand,
And kiss the bruised feet,
And know he knew it first, and loves me still,—
Perhaps, then in Gethsemane,
I might make song above my prayer,
And feel his face bending to see
My need, and clasp my faltering hand,
And guide to the white gate, and say, perhaps:
"Well done! This is thy Father's house,
Where many mansions be."
Perhaps, all spent with carrying weight
In life's sojourn,
Give humble faith unto his will,
And say, in prayer: "Thou knowest best.
Thy will be done,
So I thy presence earn."

CHAPTER XVII.

NEAR THE HEART OF CHRIST.

Many soul longings
Have I had in my day.
Now the hope of my life
Is that tree of triumph,
Ever to turn to.
Mighty my will is
To cleave to the Crucified :
My claim for shelter
Is — right to the Rood.

CÆDMON'S *Cross Lay*.

SOME one wrote of Whittier, "To live near the heart of Christ was his creed." This should be the creed of every Christian. It is to such a life of intimacy with him that Jesus invites all of his friends. "Continue ye in my love," was his exhortation. That is more than coming now and then, for an hour, into the warmth of his love. Perhaps most Christians do little more than this. They try to get into the love of Christ for a few moments

in the morning, before they go out into the world's chill air. In the evening, too, when the day's toils, tasks, and struggles are over, they creep back into the love of Christ for a benediction, as they confess faults, failures, and sins, and ask for forgiveness. They like to be folded near the heart of Christ during the night. It is a safe place to be through the dark hours.

Then they try to come into the love of Christ on Sundays, when they meet with God's people for prayer. Especially at the Lord's Table do they feel that they are in the warmth and tenderness of the love of Christ, when they receive the emblems of the supreme act of that love. These moments and hours of nesting near the heart of Jesus are very precious. They are full of blessing. They exalt these lives of ours, and give us visions of heavenly glory.

But there is something better than this possible to the believer in Christ. To continue in the love of Christ is to dwell all the while, without break, without interruption, in

this love. In the Revised Version, the word is "abide" — "Abide ye in my love." To abide is to make one's home in the place; we are to make our home in the love of Christ. Not only in the morning hour of prayer, when we are seeking blessing for the day, are we to linger in this warmth, but just as really are we to stay in it when we go out into the midst of the world's strifes and duties.

Work is not incompatible with communion with Christ. Duty does not disturb the glow of true religion. If only our heart be right and our life sincere, we may abide in the love of Christ just as really when we are busy with our common tasks and toils, as when we are bending over our Bible, or kneeling in prayer, or receiving the Lord's Supper.

Jesus said, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." It is a wonderful measure of nearness that is thus made possible to us, — we shall abide in Christ's love, even as he abides in his

Father's love. It seems almost incredible that such intimacy, such closeness, as that which existed between Christ and his Father, should be possible to us. Yet it is nothing less than this that is promised.

Then the way we can attain this unbroken abiding is also made very plain: "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love." We do not secure this nearness to the heart of Christ by staying always on our knees in prayer, by reading our Bible all the day, or by living in a monastery, hidden away from the world, devoting all our time to prayer and devotion; we secure it by obeying Christ's commandments. The work we are called to do will not break the holy communion. Indeed, there are times when we can abide in the love of Christ only by earnestly engaging in active service. The mother must leave her closet of prayer to care for the teaching and training of her children, and for her many household tasks. The Christian man would not be staying near the heart of Christ if he were to spend his days in reading his Bible and in prayer, to

the neglect of his business and his public duties.

There is need for a hidden life of devotion, to keep the heart warm and full of heavenly inspirations ; but the real abiding in Christ is in the field. We are ordained, not to be closet-saints, but to bear fruit, to do our part in the busy world's work, to stand for God among men. We can abide in the love of Christ only by keeping his commandments ; and these bid us forth to duty, to activity, to self-denial, to sacrifice. Jesus did not spend all his time on the mountain top, or in the garden, in communion with his Father. He went to these holy resorts to receive strength, to renew his wasted energies ; but the larger part of his life was given up to duty, to ministering among the people, to witnessing for his Father before men. If we fail to keep the commandments that call us to work, we shall break the fellowship which is the mark of living near the heart of Christ.

Meeting temptation, carrying burdens, facing dangers, mingling with people and min-

istering to them, — none of these experiences or duties will interfere with true closeness to Christ, if meanwhile we are living obediently. Nothing will interrupt this communion and hide the light of the love of Christ, but sin. Sin is the only undivine thing in this world, and only sin can hinder our living near the heart of Christ.

The word abide suggests a home. It is interesting to think of the love of Christ as our true home. We know what a shelter a happy home is. We flee there from the world's strifes and temptations, and find safety. No enemy can follow us through the door. The love of Christ is a refuge, a place of shelter. There is something very sacred in the thought of the old hymn which speaks of Christ as a great rock, — "Rock of Ages, cleft for me." We abide in Christ's very heart.

But home is more than shelter ; it is also a place of communion. There hearts are sure of each other. There love flows. To abide in the love of Christ is to stay in its light and warmth as one dwells in a happy home. For

continuing in the love of Christ does not mean to continue loving Christ, but to continue in the consciousness of being loved by Christ, to stay where the blessedness of that love shall ever stream about us. We know what it is to abide in human love. It is to live in such perfect, unhindered relations with one who is dear to us that nothing ever intercepts the flow of light and joy from his heart. There is no misunderstanding, no estrangement in feeling or affection, no disturbing of confidence. We continue in our friend's love. To abide in Christ's love is to live so that there shall never be even a shadow between his face and our heart. That is what it is to have the heart of Christ for our soul's home. The communion is unbroken.

There is no other spiritual culture like that which comes from such abiding in the love of Christ. Companionship with noble natures is always wondrously refining. A pure friendship with one of lofty spirit is most enriching in its influence upon our life. "I had a friend," was given as the secret of a transformation

of character which attracted many eyes. But there is no friendship that so exalts and ennobles a life as that of Christ. To abide in his love is to let that love enter the heart and permeate the whole being.

We have the story of St. John as an illustration of what living near the heart of Christ will do for a man of common mould. There are indications that John was not at first the disciple of gentle love whom we know in later life. He was of fiery and resentful mood, a son of thunder. But one happy day he followed Jesus, and was invited to his dwelling-place for a long talk. From that time he continued to live near Christ's heart of love. He seems to have entered more deeply into fellowship with his Master than any other one of the disciples. Abiding in the warmth of that blessed love, he absorbed its sweetness into his own soul, and was transformed into the same spirit.

It is interesting to notice that John spoke of himself, not as the disciple who loved Jesus, but as the disciple whom Jesus loved. It was not his loving of Christ that wrought the won-

derful change in him, but Christ's loving of him. It was as when a diamond lies in the sunshine until the sunshine enters into it, and then in the darkness shines, emitting the soft light which had hidden away in it while it was lying in the sun's beams. John dwelt in the love of Christ until his own nature was filled with Christ's love; then those who saw him saw the shining of Christ's beauty in his face.

It was the same in greater or less measure with all the friends of Christ. Mary sat at his feet and heard his words, abiding in his love, and her life became wondrously beautiful. St. Peter, when he came first to Jesus, was an unspiritual man, unrefined, with undisciplined nature. Jesus looked into his heart, and seeing there the possibilities of fine character and great strength, said to him, "Thou art Simon; thou shalt be Peter." It was not easy to make an ideal Christian man of Simon; but he, too, stayed near the heart of the Master, abiding in his love, and in that place of softening, mellowing power, as in a divine alembic, his

coarse, rugged nature was changed into a gentleness, a sweetness, and a beauty which made his one of the most influential personalities of all Christian history.

So it has been through all the centuries. Personal friendship with Jesus has been making the world over again. Men and women have been abiding in the love of Christ, with more or less closeness; and the love of that heart has entered into them and made them Christians.

Not all Christians, however, are staying near to that infinite source of all spiritual life and power. Some are living afar off; the multitude seek no special closeness to the Master, are satisfied with a very ordinary fellowship; only the few long for that abiding in which John was so wondrously blessed.

If we keep ourselves in the love of Christ continually, we shall be led into closer and ever closer fellowship with him; and then what our friends call the end, when they stand by us at the last, will be but passing through the veil into the perfect communion.

“What if, mind and thought decayed,
Old, I lose thee from my ken,
Thou chiefest of the sons of men,
And thy worth from memory fade;
O most loving Lord! what then?

Nay, but thou wilt not forget;
In thy memory lives my boast;
On the everlasting coast
Thou wilt meet and own me yet,
To the end and uttermost.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LIFE THAT NOW IS.

"Somewhere the wind is blowing,
I thought as I toiled along
In the burning heat of the noontide,
And the fancy made me strong.
Yes, somewhere the wind is blowing,
Though here where I gasp and sigh,
Not a breath of air is stirring,
Not a cloud in the burning sky.

Somewhere the thing we long for
Exists on earth's wide bound;
Somewhere the sun is shining
When winter nips the ground.
Somewhere the flowers are springing,
Somewhere the corn is brown,
And ready unto the harvest
To feed the hungry town."

THERE is an impression among certain people that the advantages of Christian faith are only or chiefly for the other world. They will admit that religion is a good thing for dying—that it takes one safely through the valley of shadows, and into the Father's house

in heaven. But they say that for the present life it yields no profit, that, indeed, it hinders one's pleasure, and stands in the way of one's success and prosperity.

But these are incorrect impressions. We do not have to wait till we reach heaven to get the benefits of faith in Christ. Religion has "the promise of the life that now is," as well as of "that which is to come." God bestows rich spiritual blessings and comforts upon us in this present life. While fountains of eternal blessedness burst out on the mountains of God in glory, rills and rivers of grace flow also through our poor, parched, sorrow-smitten earthly portion, fertilizing and enriching it. Religion has uncounted benefits for the life of earth.

There are those who think that the Christian's life is cheerless and gloomy, empty of happiness and joy. But is it so? Let us think of some of the good things that religion brings. It brings the revelation of the love of God. Is it a gloomy thought to a man that God loves him, loves him with an

everlasting love, with a love infinitely deeper and more tender than a mother's love, with a love that never changes, and whose warm currents no unfaithfulness, no wandering, no imperfection, can chill or turn back? Religion brings redemption. Is it a gloomy thing to a weary prisoner to go out of his dark dungeon, and find himself in the open fields, in the sweet sunshine, enjoying all the blessings of liberty? Does it make a man sad, does it darken his life, to be led out of Satan's gloomy prison-house into the glorious liberty of the children of God? Religion brings full salvation. Is it a gloomy thought to know that you are saved from eternal death, and have everlasting life?

Religion brings peace. In the midst of a great battle, while a thousand cannon shook the hills, and the whole heaven quivered with the reverberations, there was a moment's pause. Not a gun was heard, far or near. During that pause a sparrow sang sweetly out from among the branches of an old tree that stood in the midst of the plain of battle.

When the cannon thundered again the sparrow was silent. It sang only in the brief pauses of the awful strife. So it is with the peace of this world. Now and then we hear a single voice singing sweetly out of a man's life, in the brief pauses of struggle, care, and discontent. But soon the strife begins again, and the bird-note of peace is hushed. No worldly man has unbroken peace. Only a single silver strain is heard now and then. There is only a brief moment of calm here and there, in the midst of a life of anxiety, unrest, and discord.

But religion brings deep peace, the peace of the Lord Jesus, a peace which is not broken by any storm, which sings in the bosom; not merely a single voice in the pauses of earth's battle, but a whole choir of voices, unceasing through all the din and strife.

Here is a little cottage by the sea. The night is dark and stormy. The waves break and thunder on the shore. The clouds pour out their rains in angry torrents. The tempest beats and roars about the cottage. But

all the evening there is joy within. The lamp burns with bright beam. The cheerful fire glows upon the hearth. A happy circle gathers about the table. Joyful songs ring out into the gloom. The dark night of storm flings no shadow inside. The angry tempest breaks not the gladness of that sweet home.

Picture this of the peace religion brings. The world is full of storms, but the Christian's heart is a chamber of cheer and joy through all. Songs ring out in the blackest night of trial. Job had this peace, and it was not broken by all his adversities. St. Paul had it; and he went singing through the world in all his tribulations, persecutions, and trials. Here is an aged Christian woman who has it. She is poor. She is a great sufferer. Every joint in her body is drawn out of its place. For thirteen years she has endured the most excruciating pains, without an hour's relief. But no little child on its mother's bosom has a deeper, sweeter joy than she. She knows that she is God's child, that he is caring for her, and that he is fitting her in

her sufferings for eternal glory. She knows that all she has to endure the Lord sends in tender love. The cross of Jesus sweetens all the bitterness of her life. Does such blessed peace make one gloomy? Does it make life cheerless and sad?

Religion reveals a loving Providence running through the Christian's life, weaving out of all its tangled threads a web of beauty. It shows a Father's hand in each event, taking the poison out of trouble, drawing the serpent-tooth out of every evil thing, bringing good out of all experiences, sheltering, guiding, and blessing his children. Is the thought of such a loving, overruling Providence a saddening or gloomy one?

There are sorrows in the Christian's life. Religion does not save us from suffering. But while sorrows, like hot, desert winds, desolate the life of the worldly man, they fertilize, enrich, and bless the portion of the child of God; for with his "south land," God has given him springs of comfort whose streams flow through every valley of tribulation. Are

the consolations of religion calculated to make men sad, or life cheerless and gloomy?

There is no other such joyous life in this world as that of the believer. Springs of heavenly blessing burst out all over his field. It has not a single desert spot. It matters not how small it may be; the Christian's little cottage and garden are better than the worldly man's thousand acres. The poor widow's one garret-room is better than the gorgeous palace of him whose splendors are not blessed by the smile of God.

We cannot even name all the blessings which religion sends into our life through its "nether springs." It changes a desert into a garden. It pours sunshine into our heart. It enriches our poverty. It makes our hard crust soft and sweet as angels' bread. It surrounds us with beautiful things. It fills our life with tokens of divine love. It sings to us in our weary hours. It cheers us when we are disheartened. It takes the anxiety, fear, and unrest out of our days. For it makes us children of God. What matters it that

this experience here is sometimes bitter, that burdens are heavy, that work is hard ; that you get no rest from toil ; that night and day your poor, tired fingers must ply the needle, or be busy in household duties ; that there come no pauses in your weary task-work ? What matters it that your heart's song is hushed every now and then by the cry of grief, or choked by tears ? What matters it that you are poor, that your clothes are threadbare, that sometimes you have only a piece of crust and a cup of water ? The Lord knows what things you need. Or what matters it that your earthly portion is so small and so poor, while you are but a pilgrim here, while heaven is your home, while you know that you are an heir of God, and that you have a glorious possession laid up in reserve ?

There was a godly man who built himself a house. It was a pleasant home, with many comforts. There was joy in it. But he said that the best thing about this home was that, sitting at his own fireside, he could see his father's house away on a distant hill-top. " No

matter the weather," said he, "whether winter or summer, spring or autumn ; no matter the sky, whether cloudless or stormy,—when I sit by my east window, my father's roof and chimney-tops, and the door into my father's house, are always visible to my sight. Then, when night comes, no matter the darkness, for far away over the fields and valleys gleams the light in my father's windows." Happy is he who builds his earthly dwelling where from its doors he can ever see afar off his heavenly Father's house with its many mansions ; and where, even in the darkest nights, its lights shine down upon him with their kindly cheer. He will then never be lonely nor afraid. He will never lose hope. He will breathe heaven's sweetness, and catch the accents of heaven's songs, and his eye will be charmed with glimpses of heaven's beauties.

Let no one say that religion makes life gloomy. However dreary the Christian's earthly lot may be, hidden springs burst up all over it. There is no sorrow which has not in it a hidden well of comfort. There is

no want up through whose dry crust blessed supply will not burst, if we but dig for it. In the West, on the broad prairies, the traveller sees oftentimes the tall derrick looming up like a ghastly skeleton in the distance. It tells a story of disappointment and vain search. Here men dug and drilled for water. They spent a fortune on this spot, hoping to strike a living spring. They went down a thousand feet or more, and found nothing. But there is no such vain search in the believer's field for wells of blessing. The worldly man may dig down ten thousand feet in his portion. He may find gold and silver. He may find diamonds. But he will not find water. Ghastly derricks stand all over the broad fields of many an unbelieving one, showing where he has sought for joy, for peace, for satisfaction, for comfort,—yet all in vain. But the child of God may strike his pick in anywhere, and fresh water will flow out. Every spot of his portion is blessed and full of blessing. Every circumstance is a well-curb, fencing in its flowing spring. He has only to drop the

bucket of faith anywhere to draw up heavenly gladness, comfort, and good. The deep furrows that sorrow ploughs in his life are only channels through which the pure waters flow to irrigate his field and enrich his heart. The heavy strokes of trial which he feels so often, and which give him so much pain, are but the smittings of the rod of God, to bring out water from the rock. These nether springs burst out all over the believer's field.

Indeed, the believer in Christ is living even now and here on the borders of heaven. The veil of sense hides the glory, but the glory is there. We are children of God, and are living in our Father's world. The love that surrounds us now and cares for us is the same love that makes heaven. We are really as safe here, if we trust God and do his will, as we will be when we get home. We are in the beginnings of everlasting life, though yet in the flesh. It is not always easy to live the Christian life in this world; but the sufferings of this present time are preparing us for the glory of the coming days. By and by

this life of toil will be over, and then we shall enter into the full blessedness.

“A little while and then the summer day,
 When I go home.
'Tis lonesome winter now, but 'twill be May
 When I go home.
Beyond the gloom of moor and fen I see
The welcome warm of those who wait for me.

Work ceases not in sunshine or in shower,
 Till I go home;
But in the stillness of the twilight hour
 I dream of home.
And when the night-wind moans across the wold,
I feel nor dread of dark nor chill of cold.

All will be well and all be happiness
 When I go home;
The wanderings all o'er and loneliness,
 When I go home.
There will be light at eventide for me,
The light that never was on land or sea.”

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